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We embarked on this project in quest of the truth about what happened to the Ottoman Armenians during World War I. Most Western scholarship on the subject has concluded that the Ottoman Empire, exploiting the fog and exigencies of war, carried out a genocidal campaign that resulted in a million or so Armenian dead. Turkish and pro-Turkish scholars have argued that Turkey, embattled by the British and Russian empires, was assailed from within by treacherous Armenians and simply defended itself. On this view, thousands of Armenians died amid deportation from troublesome combat zones, while the Turks suffered significant casualties at Armenian hands. Turning to the available contemporary documentation, we set out to discover for ourselves what had actually happened, and why.

We found the proofs of Turkey's 1915–1916 anti-Armenian genocide to be incontrovertible. The reports by Leslie Davis, the U.S. wartime consul in Harput, in central Turkey, offer a good illustration. Davis was no “Armenian-lover”; in December 1915 he questioned Armenians’ moral fiber, writing, “Mothers have given their daughters to the lowest and vilest Turks to save their own lives . . . lying and trickery and an inordinate love of money are besetting sins of almost all. . . . Absolute truthfulness is almost unknown among the members of this race. . . . From every point of view the race is one that cannot be admired.”¹ But he did not let his prejudices cloud his eyesight. During the deportations Davis sent home dozens of reports describing the Turkish atrocities, which he summarized in a conclusive memorandum in early 1918. In these reports he recalled observations such as that

of September 24, 1915, when he toured the area southeast of Harput, around Lake Gölçük (Hazar Gölü), accompanied by the American missionary Dr. Henry Atkinson:

We saw [dead bodies] all along the road. They . . . had been partially eaten by dogs. . . . There were several hundred bodies scattered over the plain . . . [mostly] of women and children. . . . Some of the bodies . . . had been burned . . . [by] Kurds . . . in order to find any gold which the people may have swallowed. . . . In most of [the lakeside] valleys there were dead bodies. . . . In one [valley] . . . there were more than fifteen hundred. . . . The stench . . . was . . . great . . . I explored [this valley] more carefully a month later. . . . [An old Kurd] . . . told us that the gendarmes had brought a party of about two thousand Armenians . . . and had made the Kurds from the neighboring villages come and kill them. . . . He acted very indignant . . . as he said the smell of their dead bodies was very disagreeable.

The old man also described a "system" whereby Armenians were massacred. They were, he said,

allowed to camp for a day or two in the valleys. . . . The gendarmes summoned the [local] Kurds . . . and ordered them to kill [the Armenians]. . . . An agreement was then made by which the Kurds were to pay the gendarmes a certain fixed sum—a few hundred pounds, or more, depending on circumstances—and were to have for themselves whatever they found on the bodies . . . in excess of that sum.

Davis learned "that the people were forced to take off their clothes before they were killed, as the Mahomedans consider the clothes taken from a dead body to be defiled." Most of the dead had "bayonet wounds. . . . Few had been shot, as bullets were too precious. . . . Nearly all of the women lay flat on their backs and showed signs of barbarous mutilation."²

One of these lakeside massacres was witnessed by three Europeans on September 17, a week before Davis's first trek. They saw Kurds on the hills above the lake shoot up a large Armenian convoy and then, bearing axes,

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attack the "defenseless flock" like "ferocious animals." Kurdish women ran down the hillside to "strip the bodies."³

What happened at Lake Gölçük in August–September 1915 was emblematic of the Armenian Genocide. But we discovered that the Armenian Genocide of 1915–1916 was only part of the story. The story is both deeper and wider. The events of 1915–1916 were part of a protracted history of violence; one has to look at Turkish behavior before and after World War I in order to understand what happened during the war years. One also has to look at how Turkey dealt with its other Christian minorities, Greeks and various Assyrian (or Syriac or Syrian) communities.⁴ This larger story extends from the pre-war years under Sultan Abdülhamid II through the wartime dominance of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) and the immediate postwar rise of the Turkish Nationalists led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. We found that, under each government, Muslim Turks came to see Asia Minor's Christian communities as a danger to their state's survival and resolved to be rid of this danger. The successive regimes dealt with Christian communities differently, though to the same end. In the course of three campaigns beginning in 1894, the Turks turned variously to tools of steady oppression, mass murder, attrition, expulsion, and forced conversion. By 1924 they had cleansed Asia Minor of its four million-odd Christians. We use the term "Turks" here advisedly. Although the Turkish state was created formally only in 1923, from the mid-nineteenth century the Turks—understood more as a cultural construct than a race—were increasingly identified by Ottoman sultans, political leaders in the empire and abroad, ideologues, and writers as the dominant group controlling the empire.

This book is structured in accordance with the staggered nature of the Turkish campaign. There are chapters on the pre-1894 background; the massacres of 1894–1896; the Armenian Genocide of 1915–1916; and the destruction of the Greeks, Assyrians, and remaining Armenians in 1919–1924. The coverage of 1915–1916 is relatively modest in light of recent, perceptive, and comprehensive scholarship on the Armenian Genocide by Raymond Kevorkian, Donald Bloxham, Taner Akçam, Ronald Grigor Suny, and others.⁵ By contrast, historians have devoted little attention to what happened in 1894–1896 and 1919–1924, and almost none to what befell Turkey's Greeks and Assyrians during this thirty-year period. We tackle these subjects in great detail.

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If other historians have not treated the entire thirty-year scope of oppression and carnage as one continuous saga, they arguably have good reasons. For one thing, the period spans three very different regimes: that of the last autocratic sultan, until 1909; of the CUP, or Young Turks, who ruled during the Great War after promising equality and supranational constitutionalism; and of Mustafa Kemal, the war hero and founder of modern Turkey during 1919–1924. For another, each regime had different aims and constituencies. The CUP and Atatürk each accused their predecessors of unnecessary cruelty toward non-Muslims. Indeed, Atatürk is famously credited with labeling the mass murder of Armenians during World War I a “shameful act.”

The traditional interpretation thus identifies three separate policies carried out according to distinctive logics tailored to their particular circumstances. The massacres of the 1890s are usually understood as Abdülhamid’s effort to cow disruptive Christians into submission. The 1915–1916 genocide is depicted as a momentary war-induced aberration. And the ethnic cleansing during 1919–1924, which resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths, is portrayed as part of a chaotic, multisided bloodletting triggered by foreign invasions and the reactive Turkish war of national liberation.

But from the documentation now available, it is clear that treating the three periods separately obfuscates the reality of what the Turks intended and what transpired. Nor does it make sense to view what happened to each of the victim communities—Armenians, Greeks, and Assyrians—in isolation. To be sure, the Turkish project evolved over time. What appeared to Abdülhamid and his entourage as a vague and disembodied idea in the 1890s crystallized under the Young Turks into a full-fledged genocidal program, with the last nails hammered into the coffin during Kemal’s National Struggle. Each regime confronted a different cluster of dangers, acted under different constraints, and imagined a different future. Ultimately, however, all three engaged in a giant and continuous crime against humanity.

The Armenians were the main victims of Turkish atrocity, in terms of the numbers slaughtered in 1894–1896 and 1915–1916. Certainly, the Turks appear to have hated them the most. This is cogently illustrated by events in Smyrna (Izmir) in September 1922. There, conquering Turkish troops murdered thousands of Armenian inhabitants before dealing with the town’s Greeks, even though the retreating Greeks had just (unsystematically)

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massacred hundreds, and perhaps thousands, of Turks on the outskirts of the city. Still, tens of thousands of Greeks would be murdered during the following days. Smyrna would prove to be merely one chapter in the destruction and expulsion of Anatolia’s vast Greek minority, which had begun before the Great War, in the first months of 1914.

As we hope to show, the annihilation of the Christian communities was not the product of a single cause. At play were fears of foreign machinations and interference, Turkish nationalism, ethnic rivalries, economic envy, and a desire to maintain political and social dominance. Perpetrators sought power, wealth, and sexual gratification. A combination of these motivations was manifest in each period and location. In the course of our research we have also concluded that these forces were joined by another overarching element: Islam. As an ethos and an ideology, Islam played a cardinal role throughout the process, in each of its stages.

We are not arguing here that Islam is a single dogma, worse than other religious dogmas. Islam has various streams, and individual Muslims feel differently about questions of practice, scriptural interpretation, and moral behavior. Inherent in Islam are humanistic and moderate traditions, and, as we emphasize in our conclusion, Christians lived in relative security under Ottoman rule for centuries. Indeed, their standing was probably more secure than that of Jews or Muslims under Christian governments during the same centuries.

Yet there is compelling evidence showing that Islam was an important driver in the events and processes described in this book. Ottoman authorities invoked jihad to mobilize the Muslim masses to massacre and plunder. Perpetrators cited jihad and Muslim law more generally to explain and justify their actions, even to argue that these actions were obligatory. Moreover, Muslim religious leaders and seminarians were prominent figures in the massacres. Indeed, even during Kemal’s ostensibly secularist National Struggle, officials, himself included, frequently referred to Islam as the basis of their actions. These same officials described the massacres of thousands of Christians, and the expulsions of hundreds of thousands more, as jihad. Islam was the glue that bound together perpetrating Turks, Kurds, Circassians, Chechens, and Arabs and was the common marker of identity separating them from their Christian victims. In 1894–1896, 1915–1918, and 1919–1924, conversion

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to Islam was often the only path to survival for Christians who remained in the empire.

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The Sources

This study focuses on what happened in Asia Minor and Constantinople, with more limited treatment of events in eastern Thrace (specifically, the vilayet of Edirne) and in the northwestern corner of Persia. We refrain almost completely from covering events in the Caucasus, despite the fact that this remote mountainous region was periodically engulfed in warfare among Turks, Russians, Azeris, Armenians, Georgians, and other groups, with accompanying large-scale massacres by all who participated. What happened in the Caucasus requires a study of its own, partly because these events were not synchronic with those in Asia Minor, and partly because the relevant archival material is often inaccessible or written in languages with which we are unfamiliar.

Focusing on Asia Minor and Constantinople, one also encounters serious archival problems. To some degree, these affected our research and writing and so need to be described and explained.

The Ottoman Empire, and later Turkey, had large, organized bureaucracies churning out massive amounts of state papers, which eventually made their way to a number of archives. The most important are the Ottoman Archives of the Office of the Prime Minister (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri) and the archive of the General Staff Military History and Strategy (Genelkurmay Askeri Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt) Institute in Ankara. The military archive is in effect closed to researchers. And the prime ministry's archives, as well as smaller provincial archives, have undergone several bouts of purging, starting with the weeding out of records by exiting CUP officials at the end of World War I. Since then, Turkish officials have further sanitized the archives so that researchers today will find almost no documentation incriminating Ottoman Turkish leaders in the ethnic cleansings between 1894 and 1924. Similarly, the many volumes of state documents covering these years, which the Turkish government has published over the past few decades, contain almost no direct evidence of Turkish culpability.

While much has been whitewashed, a good deal was never archived in the first place. Knowing that they were ordering or engaged in criminal activity,

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the political leaders in Constantinople and in the provinces, often in real time, ordered all copies of telegrams destroyed after reading. Sometimes they transmitted instructions orally, to avoid leaving paper trails, or used euphemisms to camouflage their intentions and deeds. The same, apparently, is true of reports going up the chain of command, from local officials and commanders to Constantinople.⁶

A scholar relying only, or principally, on Turkish state archives and published Turkish official volumes will inevitably produce highly distorted history of Turkish-Christian relations from the beginning of the Hamidian period, in 1876, until the end of the ethnic cleansing in 1924. Countless Turkish and "pro-Turkish" historians have done just that.

How do we know that the Ottoman and Turkish archives have been purged of incriminating materials? There are some clear indications. First, hundreds of large-scale massacres were committed throughout the period we have studied. This is no longer a matter of opinion, and even those who claim that there was no deliberate and organized genocide do not question that many massacres took place. Yet in all the accessible archival and published documentation on the events of 1914–1916, there are just a handful of mentions of "improper treatment." In the only such accessible Turkish document openly admitting a massacre by the Ottoman side, a cabinet minister berates a governor for also murdering non-Armenians, in contravention of his orders.

Second, senior officials resisting orders to deport and massacre were recalled, punished, and replaced. Several were executed. There is hardly any mention of this in the accessible correspondence. Occasionally, the archival purge was insufficiently thorough, and one or two letters from recalcitrant governors have surfaced. But the government's responses and reactions are always missing.

Third, there is almost no mention of the actions of the Special Organization (Teşkilat-ı mahsusa), whose operatives played a prominent role in the destruction of the Armenians. Even if, as some critics argue, the Special Organization was not, as a body, part of the extermination process, the absence of Special Organization operatives and activities from the accessible documentation attests to the archival cleansing.

Fourth, according to external materials, CUP stalwarts and Special Organization executives such as Dr. Bahaettin Şakır and Dr. Selanikli Mehmet

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Nâzım (Nâzım Bey) orchestrated massacres, and provincial party secretaries played key roles. Their powers often exceeded those of governors and military commanders. The archives and officially published documentation contain almost no correspondence from these CUP members and provincial secretaries.

Fifth, in the brief, largely inconclusive postwar trials conducted by the Ottoman government under Allied tutelage, a substantial number of telegrams were presented as evidence of massacres and murderous intent. Many of these documents have disappeared. Historians who present the official Turkish narrative argue that the documents were fakes.

Finally, the fact that Turkey has always barred researchers from viewing 1914–1924 materials in the Ankara military archive strongly suggests that the state is hiding something.

Akçam offers the most comprehensive description of Turkish archival manipulation and obfuscation.⁷ At the end of World War I, Talât Pasha hurriedly gathered and burned every government document related to the Armenian genocide that he could find. So did the new grand vizier, Ahmet İzzet Pasha.⁸ Members of the CUP Central Committee, including Nâzım, did the same for relevant CUP documentation. Purges of documentation continued in stages, long after the establishment of the republic. The archives were opened to foreign researchers in the 1980s, but only after government agents would have had a chance to locate any remaining incriminating material and ensure it would not be seen. Even as researchers were first gaining entry, it was well known that a group of retired diplomats and military officers had privileged access, which they could have used to destroy evidence.⁹ On the basis of information provided by other researchers, we believe that a final purge was conducted more recently, during the digitization of the archives. Readers today initially have access only to digitized documents.

But the main reason not to trust the Turkish archives is that reliable sources contradict them. Masses of 1894–1924 German, Austro-Hungarian, British, American, and French documents, produced by diplomats and consular officials working in Turkey and available in Western archives, as well as the papers of dozens of Western missionaries who worked in Turkey during those years, tell a completely different story from the one purveyed in official, accessible Turkish papers and in Turkish nationalist narratives.

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For decades, Turkish apologists and their supporters have dismissed this Western documentation as tendentious and even specious, the invention of prejudiced Christians aiming to vilify blameless Muslims. As seen from Constantinople, Britain, France, and the United States were allied against the Turks during the First World War, so their official documents must have been anti-Turkish propaganda. The Christian missionaries, most of them Americans, were deemed even worse. They were intimately connected to the Armenians and had themselves fomented anti-Turkish and anti-Muslim sentiment among Christians. How could they be expected to produce unprejudiced accounts of Turkish, Armenian, and Greek actions and thinking during the decades when Turks and Christians were busy “fighting each other”? (Turks have long, and falsely, characterized the events of this thirty-year period as mutual blood-letting and warfare rather than as genocide.)

This dismissal of American, British, and French documentation is highly problematic. For one thing, it wrongly presumes that foreign diplomatic opinion toward Turkey was uniform. There were many foreign diplomats in the Ottoman Empire—in 1905, the British alone had twenty-nine consulates—and they were not all of one mind. Most British, French, and American diplomats and consuls present during 1894–1924 probably did see the local Christians as persecuted underdogs, but others were neutral. Still others—most prominently High Commissioner Mark Bristol, the top U.S. representative in Turkey during August 1919–1927—favored the Turks and dismissed Greeks and Armenians as pusillanimous and inferior races. Bristol was not alone in harboring such sentiments.

Moreover, while many Western diplomats and officers may have shared, and even displayed, pro-Christian sympathies, almost all were professionals. They were trained and expected to report accurately what they saw, while, of course, casting a positive light on their own activities and their governments’ policies. British, American, and French reporting was classified and for internal, institutional consumption, not designed to sway public opinion or international mediators. If their reports were “anti-Turkish,” this was mainly because they heard about or witnessed behavior and attitudes that were brutal and often criminal.

It is particularly important that French sources corroborate stories of massacres, forced deportation, and, in general, ethnic cleansing. That is because

the French were typically less "pro-Christian" than were their Anglo-Saxon allies, certainly before and after 1914–1918. French diplomacy during 1920–1924 tended to be pro-Turkish, and the French military, while fighting the Turks during 1920–1921, tended to have a jaundiced view of the Armenians, Greeks, and even the British. The French army in Turkey was largely composed of Muslim colonial troops, and their superior officers had to take these soldiers' affinity for local Muslim populations into account in their dealings with Turks.

Accusations against Christian, and especially American, missionaries are no more persuasive than those against foreign officials. Most missionaries were well-educated and liberal, albeit deeply Christian, in outlook. Diligently following Ottoman rules, they had come to work only with Christian denominations, not to illegally convert Muslims. They did wish to protect Christians from harm and often supplied them with aid, but they rarely deliberately endeavored to undermine the state. By and large their reports, like those of the diplomats and officers, were intended for internal, not outsiders', perusal. The missionaries were writing to superiors, friends, and family to inform them as accurately as possible of what they saw, heard, and understood. Few of them had great sympathy for Muslim Turks or Kurds but all shared a common fear of divine and collegial reproach and so tried to cleave to the truth.

In addition to reports from missionaries and British, French, and American diplomats, in some chapters we have used extensively reports by German and Austrian diplomats, residents, and travelers in Turkey. German-Ottoman relations began warming a few years before World War I, and Austria-Hungary and Germany were the Ottoman Empire's main allies in the war. Some officers in the higher echelons of the German army condoned the Armenian deportations; many didn't. While Germans and Austrians had nothing to gain from tarnishing the Ottoman reputation, their reports from the provinces during 1914–1918 almost invariably parallel and corroborate the findings of Allied counterparts: Muslim-Turkish genocidal and expulsionist intent and the butchery of masses of unarmed Christians. Reports and diary entries by German and Scandinavian missionaries tell the same story.

The German diplomatic reports, as well as reports by German travelers and German-linked missionaries, were assembled from the German Foreign

Ministry archive by a German scholar, Wolfgang Gust. They are published online at www.armenocide.com and in a densely packed, 786-page English translation. We have also used a similar volume of Austro-Hungarian diplomatic reports emanating from Turkey during the war.

Further corroboration comes from postwar trials of war criminals in Constantinople, memoirs and speeches by Turkish officials, and interviews published in Turkish newspapers and journals. And while, as we have noted, there are serious problems with Turkish state archives and official documentation, these are not totally useless. We have combed them thoroughly and have found documents that help explain what happened. Often they reinforce the evidence in Western sources. We have also relied on secondary literature, which, in the case of Turkish-Armenian relations during World War I, has burgeoned in recent years.

Although we have made every effort to be comprehensive in our use of archival materials, we realize that a great deal is missing. This was, after all, the intention of those covering their tracks. If more Turkish sources were available, we would have included them. We believe, though, that the documentation we have used is a sufficient basis for a credible description and analysis of what happened. The reader will judge.

Nationalist Awakenings in the Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Empire

For many in the Ottoman Empire, the first months of 1878 were a nightmare come true. Russian artillery batteries pounded the suburbs of Constantinople, and the empire's European provinces were all but lost. Large chunks of the Caucasus and northeast Anatolia, as far as Erzurum, were overrun by the Russian army, the Ottomans' age-old nemesis. The imperial coffers were empty, and a new, authoritarian regime was doing its best to sweep away hard-won civil liberties.¹

Only a year or so earlier, the situation looked very different. Not only was life relatively peaceful, but it also seemed that a measure of open-mindedness had taken hold. On December 23, 1876, after a century of incremental legal reforms, Turkey adopted a modern constitution. Drawn up mainly by the reformist minister Midhat Pasha and his Armenian companion Krikor Odian, the charter promised a new bill of rights for all and improved status for the empire's non-Muslim subjects. Midhat hoped that by guaranteeing certain freedoms and protections for minorities, including Christians, the empire might stave off threatened European encroachment. The constitution even placed some constraint on the sultan, forcing him to share power with a senate of *grandees*—albeit, subject to his own appointment—and a chamber of deputies selected by an electoral college directly elected at the provincial level.²

Midhat and fellow reformists had taken advantage of a moment of anarchy. In May 1876 the veteran sultan Abdülaziz, under whose reign the pace of westernization had quickened, was deposed in a coup d'état. His opponents accused him of squandering the country's assets on grand homes and

grand ships. He was replaced by Murad V, his nephew, but the new sultan was ousted after only three months, when it emerged that he was mentally unstable. He was replaced by his brother, Abdülhamid II, who was believed to be sympathetic to the reformist cause.

But even as the reformists were formulating the constitution and electoral system, the stage was being set for the Russian invasion. The immediate cause was a rebellion in the Ottoman territory of Bulgaria. The empire was already on shaky ground, brought to the edge of bankruptcy by an exceptionally long dry spell and a welter of high-interest loans coming due. A Bulgarian uprising which broke out in April 1876 added to these considerable woes. Determined to protect his rule and his empire from external threats, Sultan Abdülaziz, in his last month in office, responded with a hard line. He moved to crush the Bulgarian rebellion, curtail the new freedoms, reinstate his au-



An Armenian volunteer soldier during the Balkan Wars. Some Armenians fought in the Ottoman army, while others joined Bulgarian and Russian combat units.

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thority, and restore order and discipline. He suspended the constitution; dispersed the parliament; and sent his irregulars, the *Başı Bozüks*, to quash the Bulgarians. The revolt and the crisis that followed were inherited and exacerbated by Abdülhamid.

The Bulgarian suppression triggered outrage in the West, especially in Britain, where former Prime Minister William Gladstone and his opposition Liberal Party decried the cruelty of the "Turkish race" and what soon became known as the "Bulgarian atrocities." Gladstone memorably wrote of the Turks, "They were, upon the whole, from the black day when they first entered Europe, the one great anti-human specimen of humanity. Wherever they went, a broad line of blood marked the track behind them, and as far as their dominion reached, civilisation disappeared from view."³ Outraged Europeans called for Balkan liberation from Ottoman rule.

This was the opening Russia needed. Exploiting the anti-Turkish fervor and claiming its position as standard-bearer of a new pan-Slavic consciousness, the tsar moved to rescue his Bulgarian protégés and attack a traditional foe. In April 1877 Russian forces passed through Romania and crossed the Danube. Another Russian army invaded eastern Anatolia. By summer, the Ottoman army was in retreat, and the Russians had occupied Edirne (Adrianople) and eastern Thrace. The road to Constantinople was open.

Germany, Britain, and France refused to take sides, leading to condemnation from Abdülhamid. However, notwithstanding the sultan's suspicions of collusion against him, the three powers were not in cahoots with the Russians and had no wish to see the Ottoman Empire dismantled. Britain and Germany sought to preserve the balance of power and avert a new pan-European war. They were therefore loath to get involved with Russia's adventure, which could lead to widening conflict and weaken their own positions. But as the Russians closed in on Constantinople and the Straits, European leaders took fright and successfully forced the Russians and Turks to accept a ceasefire. When that broke down, a Russian fleet descended on the Bosphorus for what could have been the death blow. Finally a British squadron made for the Dardanelles. The threat persuaded the Russians to halt at San Stefano (Yeşilköy), a village near Constantinople, where they and the Turks signed the treaty that ended the war on March 3, 1878.

The Ottomans paid a steep price. They were forced to cede most of their Balkan possessions. Romania, Serbia, and Montenegro were declared

independent; Bosnia and Herzegovina were to enjoy greater autonomy under Austro-Hungarian tutelage; and the Bulgarians were awarded an enlarged, autonomous principality. Russia entrenched itself in eastern Anatolia and the southern Caucasus, establishing an official presence in Kars, Batumi, and other key sites.

Some Ottoman Armenians, alienated by Abdülhamid's increasingly repressive rule, hoped to make permanent the Russian occupation in eastern Anatolia. During the San Stefano negotiations, the Armenian patriarch in Constantinople attempted to turn these hopes into reality. In a secret note sent via the exilarch, the spiritual head of the Armenian Church at Etchmiadzin, he asked the tsar to hold on to the parts of Anatolia captured in the war. The patriarch also sought Russian protection in case the treaty allowed the Ottomans to retain power over Armenians and asked the Russians to ensure that Armenians would receive the same rights as those granted the Balkan peoples. Russia, the patriarch urged, should insist on supervisory powers and Armenian security against the marauding Circassian and Kurdish tribes of the eastern provinces.⁴ The patriarch didn't get everything he wanted, but Clause 16 of the treaty provided for substantive reforms in the Armenian-inhabited areas, including a larger measure of autonomy, representation in provincial governance, and security guarantees.⁵

The treaty almost immediately became a dead letter. Wary of growing Russian influence in the Balkans and eastern Anatolia, the great powers scuttled the accord a few months after it was signed. In Berlin in 1878, British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli and German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck agreed on a new settlement, favoring the Ottomans. Macedonia and eastern Thrace were returned, the size of the Bulgarian autonomous zone was reduced, and the Straits were left in Turkish hands, albeit with assurance of unhampered passage for international shipping.

But the Treaty of Berlin failed to mollify the Ottoman leadership or foster reconciliation inside the ethnically diverse empire. Indeed, the effect was the opposite. By preserving a considerable degree of Ottoman rule over the Christian minorities, while also offering those minorities some protections, the outside powers merely reinforced the divisive status quo. The treaty left the Greek situation ambiguous: Greece was awarded Thessaly and parts of Epirus, but Crete and some Greek-speaking regions north of Greece remained under

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Ottoman control, ensuring continued tension and grievances among the Ottoman Greek minority.

The Ottomans also had misgivings about the treaty's handling of the Armenians. Article 61, using a common diplomatic term for the Ottoman government, stated:

The Sublime Porte undertakes to carry out, without further delay, the improvements and reforms . . . in the provinces inhabited by Armenians, and to guarantee their security against the Circassians and Kurds. It will periodically make known the steps taken to this effect to the Powers, who will superintend their application.⁶

Although San Stefano had also included reforms, it had said nothing about external supervision.⁷ The Turkish governing elite saw Article 61 as a prelude to Armenian independence, abetted by foreign powers.

Even before Berlin the Turks had regarded "their" Christians with suspicion, which the patriarch's outreach to Russia only confirmed. After Berlin suspicion turned to near-certainty; non-Muslim communities were pegged as traitors collaborating with outside powers to dismember the empire. The cost of keeping Russia at bay was to elevate Ottoman fears of Christian fifth columnists and thereby further isolate and endanger the minorities whose plight had so angered European people and governments.

Over the course of the next fifteen years or so, European ambassadors busied themselves devising mechanisms for reform. They insisted on fair treatment and guarantees of security for Armenians and to some extent for Greeks. But Constantinople was never on board and sought to derail the process, leading to further persecution of minorities who eventually radicalized in response. It was the growing Armenian nationalist ferment that the government sought to crush in 1894.

But it was not Article 61 alone that drove Ottoman anxieties. The tension between the empire's Muslim majority and Christian minorities had been rising for decades. To understand what led the outside powers to advocate Ottoman reform and, ultimately, to the first major outbreak of anti-Christian violence, we need to go back to the first half of the nineteenth century and trace the changing status of the empire's non-Muslim minorities.

Such understanding begins with the recognition that Anatolia's Christian groups were not monolithic; while urban communities flourished for much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, their rural coreligionists suffered both Ottoman attention and neglect. Where there was government, it often behaved harshly. Where there wasn't—for the farther reaches of the vast empire were virtually impossible to control—Kurds, Turkmen, Circassians, and other non-Turkish Muslim tribes filled the void with tacit state approval. They tended to rule for the benefit of their own, with little regard for the welfare of Christian minorities. Sometimes local warlords operated in parallel with the state, piling on additional taxes and supplementing the discriminatory Ottoman justice system with their own mistreatment. While outside influence and foreign events inspired the first stirrings of Greek and Armenian nationalism among prosperous city-dwellers, it was to great extent the plight of rural groups—especially Armenians—that precipitated the growing sense of ethnic unity among the Christian communities.

This complication—acknowledging the distinctive experiences of urban and rural communities, and their coproduction of nationalism—defies conventional historiography. Typically, historians propagate two narratives about the decades leading to the explosion of 1894–1896.⁸ One, crudely referred to as the Armenian narrative, describes a worsening saga of Ottoman oppression directed against Armenian and Greek subjects. The other, equally crudely described as the Turkish narrative, tells the story of an enlightened and generous Ottoman state falling prey to nefarious outside imperialist forces conspiring with perfidious Christian minorities. Each account is biased and politically driven. Each breaks along national-ethnic lines. And each relies on verifiable historical sources. The two narratives are so far apart that they seem irreconcilable.

We suggest that both are true—or, more precisely, that solid evidence can be found to buttress both. The real story is one of urban-rural bifurcation, which, amid the peasants' distress, was eventually resolved in the form of emergent proto-national communities. It was these that the Ottoman state found so threatening.

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The Rise of the Urban Armenian and Greek Communities

For the major urban Armenian communities of western Anatolia and the Balkans—in Constantinople, Edirne, Smyrna (Izmir), Bursa, and elsewhere—the nineteenth century, until the retrenchment of the late 1870s, was largely a time of progress, prosperity, and growing autonomy. In particular, the second half of the nineteenth century saw a significant increase in commerce with Europe and a concomitant growth of coastal cities such as Smyrna, where Greek communities benefited disproportionately. Greek merchants also had considerable success along the Black Sea littoral. Most trade with Europe and in the interior of Asia Minor was in the hands of Greeks and Armenians. And both groups were prominent in industry, such as goldsmithing, textile production, mining, and shipping. Armenians dominated Bursa's silk manufacture.⁹

Indeed, urban religious minorities had long held important economic roles in the empire. In the eighteenth century, the great majority of bankers who provided loans to Turkish grandees seeking office were Armenian. These bankers, who became the richest in Europe, also lent to local potentates who leased tax farms (*iltizam*) from the government and other wealthy individuals and guaranteed the loans. Jews and Greeks had previously dominated this field.¹⁰ Armenians were further valuable as dragomans, interpreters offering linguistic and cultural guidance. They worked in the newly opened embassies in the fashionable Constantinople quarter of Pera or as local representatives of commercial enterprises, such as the British Levant Company and its French, Dutch, and Italian rivals.¹¹ Some Armenians prospered by branching out westward: "By the middle of the nineteenth century there were over thirty Armenian commercial firms in London and Manchester with their headquarters located either in Smyrna or Constantinople."¹² Armenians and Greeks also figured significantly in the modern professions. The Armenian Balyan family, for example, provided the palace with its architects.¹³ Other Ottoman minorities rose to prominence as royal financial advisors. Many of these professionals were trained abroad, in European universities.

Prosperity earned minorities invitations to join the Ottoman elite. Well-to-do Armenian families were known as *amiras*, from "emir." The title, initially conferred by the palace only on notables in the sultan's service, came to designate all Armenian grandees.¹⁴ For their part, several Greek-Orthodox

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Turkish, Russian, Greek, and Jewish boys in Constantinople. The non-Muslim communities of the Ottoman Empire enjoyed relative toleration for centuries, but tensions grew at the end of the 1800s.

In the early nineteenth century, urban Armenians—traditionally “the most pacific of all the ethnic elements in the empire”—were already doing well and were clearly on an upward trajectory.¹⁹ Greeks and Jews were, too. The size of these minorities is unclear: Constantinople periodically conducted surveys and published estimates, which downplayed the number of non-Muslims; the Armenian and Greek patriarchates, usually with still greater distortion, exaggerated Christian numbers. But what demographic information exists suggests that, by late century, Christians constituted a significant minority. An 1880 survey prepared by the Armenian Patriarchate found that in the six eastern vilayets of Anatolia alone there were 1,561,600 Armenians, outnumbering the 1,054,800 Muslims.²⁰ These were largely rural regions, but the sizeable number of eastern Armenians was an important basis for their urban brethren’s claims to special status. One scholar has estimated that the Ottoman Empire had a population of 38,500,000 in 1876, of which 35 percent were Turks, 6.5 percent Armenians, and 5.5 percent Greeks.²¹ But in Anatolia, the proportion of Armenians and Greeks was greater. In 1897, after the massacres

families traditionally residing in the Phanar quarter of Constantinople, and hence known as Phanariotes (*Fenerliler*, in Turkish), held some of the most influential positions in the empire, including as prince-governors (hospodars) of Wallachia and Moldavia. Greeks had the honor of serving as dragomans of the palace and the imperial navy. However, most of these privileged positions were rescinded after the Greek mainland revolted against Ottoman rule in 1821, a process that culminated in Greek independence in 1830.¹⁵

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, urban minority communities were well organized and enjoyed a degree of control over their affairs. The major urban Armenian communities were divided into three groups: a religious-clerical hierarchy headed by the patriarch, a notability, and the mass of cityfolk, most of whom were associated with professional guilds known as *esnafs*.¹⁶ While some of the *esnafs* were ethnically mixed, others, such as the silversmiths, coppersmiths, grocers, and shoemakers, were entirely Greek or Armenian.¹⁷ Though not as rich or powerful as the amiras, the heads of successful *esnafs* wielded considerable influence. Some guilds accumulated large fortunes, which they used to fund the needs of their communities, such as paying taxes on residents’ behalf. Such charity assured guilds sway in the day-to-day running of their respective *millet*s, the empire’s non-Muslim confessional communities.

Each *millet*—the main ones being Armenian, Greek Orthodox, and Jewish—was governed by the laws of the *dhimma*. While the patriarchs, chief rabbi, and their organizations possessed some lawful authority, their communities also had to demonstrate obedience to Muslim rule by fulfilling a series of obligations such as paying additional taxes and observing limitations on the construction of churches and synagogues. But marriage, divorce, certain internal disputes, and matters pertaining to religious law were dealt with inside the *millet*. Each had its own courts with the power to enforce verdicts, including imprisonment and corporal punishment. The mid-nineteenth century Tanzimat reforms—legal changes introduced by Constantinople to modernize the country and relieve pressure from European powers—annulled many of the *dhimma* laws but essentially left the *millet* system in place.¹⁸ Minorities were thus granted civil rights that put them almost on a par with their Muslim peers, while retaining a large measure of religious and lay autonomy.

of 1894-1896, the Ottoman authorities, who traditionally under-counted the number of Christians, assessed that there were more than a million Greeks and about 1.1 million Armenians in Anatolia, compared with just over 10 million Turks.²² There were also more than 600,000 Assyrian Christians in the areas of the Ottoman Empire and western Persia, exclusive of Greater Syria, before World War I. Most were rural peasants.²³

Rural Decline

As urban non-Muslim communities in western Anatolia and the Balkans were growing stronger economically and politically, their rural counterparts faced increasing hardship. In part this was a product of Constantinople's limited reach. In eastern Anatolia, outside the major towns, central-government control was mostly nominal. The countryside was dominated by shifting groups of local notables, insurgents, semi-nomadic Kurdish and Turkmen tribes, and the occasional governor sent from the capital who might "go native" and disregard Constantinople's "instructions" on guidelines.

Political authority was measured mainly by the ability to collect taxes and, relatedly, extort money from the populace. Peasants often ignored government demands, instead paying taxes—in cash or kind—to local warlords and factions. In the areas of Armenian inhabitation, taxes were collected by tribal leaders, ex-governors and army officers who had martial retinues, and other potentates. The experience of rural Turkish, Arab, and Greek communities was much like that of the Armenian peasants: all were fleeced by local big-shots. The absence of central authority was felt everywhere, and the result was a gradual weakening of rural society. Ironically, it was these taxes, often forcibly collected from impoverished peasants, which enriched many Armenian bankers.²⁴

Before the rise of Armenian nationalism, very little connected the Armenian notables of Constantinople to their compatriots in the countryside. The two groups may have shared a belief system, a language, and a vague sense of common ethnic origin, but any possibility of unity was undermined by the economic and social chasms that lay between. Granted, the dichotomy was not always sharp; Armenian communities in provincial town centers occupied a middle ground. On the whole, though, the disparate experiences and

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trajectories of the two groups indicate the preeminence of class over ethnic solidarity.²⁵

Reform and Proto-Nationalism in Constantinople's Christian Communities

Ottoman Armenians and Greeks took different paths toward nationalism. While Greeks could seek guidance and a sense of shared peoplehood from a state beyond the empire's shores, Armenians had to find their national bearings within the empire. This resulted in relatively low-intensity agitation on the part of Ottoman Greeks. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, Ottoman Greeks were basically satisfied with the existence, in the distance, of the Balkan Greek polity. They respected that state and were proud of its achievements, but they did not see themselves as belonging to it. From the perspective of the Muslim elite, Greece was a part of the empire that had already been given up.

In the Armenian case, on the other hand, there was no state, not even a lucidly imagined one, and when an Armenian national movement finally materialized, the state it contemplated included heavily Armenian regions of the empire: the six eastern vilayets and Cilicia. Some nationalists extended this vision to encompass all of eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus, stretching from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea. Such a state would dissect the empire, severing Anatolia from the Arab provinces of Greater Syria and Mesopotamia and separating the Ottomans from the Turkic peoples of central Asia. The Ottoman elite thus regarded the Armenian "dream" as far more threatening than anything the Ottoman Greeks might strive for.

The Greek Orthodox Church and faith long served as the glue binding the Ottoman Greeks together. But during the last decades of the nineteenth century, urban Greeks increasingly looked toward Greece itself, which almost none had ever seen, as a cultural beacon and source of pride. Critical to this process was "linguistic rehellenization." Many Greeks, notably in Cappadocia, spoke only Turkish.²⁶ A vastly expanded Ottoman Greek school system would teach them the Greek language and the culture associated with its speakers.²⁷

The Kingdom of Greece was instrumental in this effort. Through its expanding range of consulates, Greece exported cultural and, eventually,

political Hellenism in Asia Minor.³⁵ The first consulates were installed in the Ottoman Empire in the 1840s; by 1904, there were twenty-two.³⁶ Consuls toured the countryside, gave lectures, and dispersed Greek-language publications. They propagated both Greekness and the *Mezali Idea*—the Great Idea—of Greek geopolitical expansion. Consuls celebrated the ancient Athenian and medieval Byzantine empires as models for the reestablishment of a large Greek polity, perhaps with Constantinople as its capital, on the eventual ruins of the Ottoman Empire. Underlying the Great Idea was also a cultural mission “to civilize the East by rising against Ottoman rule, in the manner of Christ’s rising to save the world,” as historian John S. Koliopoulos puts it.³⁷ In 1864 King George I of Greece was crowned king of the Hellenes, hinting at these expansionist dreams and indicating the Greek state’s claim to represent Greeks wherever they were. Athenian politicians spoke of saving the “unredeemed portion of the Greek nation.”³⁸ Koliopoulos writes that most mainland Greeks “viewed the territorial settlement of 1830,” when the Kingdom of Greece was established, “as nothing more than a temporary arrangement. Successive Greek territorial gains were expected to keep pace with Ottoman decline.”³⁹

Beyond the official work of the Greek government and its consuls, mainland cultural and linguistic clubs such as the Athens-based Association for the Propagation of Greek Letters fostered the national awakening of the Ottoman Greeks, much as Arab-language groups within the empire were concurrently promoting Arab nationalist movements. In the 1880s the government in Athens officially charged the association with “the supervision of educational and national activities” among the Ottoman Greeks, effectively endorsing irredentism.⁴⁰ Teachers were sent from the mainland to the far reaches of Anatolia and Anatolian youngsters were brought to Greece for study. Anatolian teachers returning from Greece nationalized the curriculum of the community’s main religious college, the Halki Seminar on Heybeliada, near Constantinople.⁴¹

Despite these efforts to instruct Ottoman Greeks in the Great Idea, their nationalism was largely cultural rather than political. The expansion of literacy and the spread of nationalism among Ottoman Greeks had the “peasant and merchant . . . say, parrot-wise, ‘I am a descendant of Pericles,’” in Arnold Thynnes’s memorable phrase.⁴² But it didn’t have them fomenting rebellion.

One moderating factor was the relatively open atmosphere in the Ottoman Empire generated by the Tanzimat and its ideology of Ottomanism. This view facilitated the spread of particularistic identities by holding that one could be Ottoman while celebrating one’s Greek, Armenian, or other affiliations.⁴³ For some, this meant there need be no contradiction between Greek ethnicity and Ottoman nationality. Moreover, in the decades immediately preceding World War I, the focus of official Greek irredentism was on Macedonia, not Asia Minor.⁴⁴ The Orthodox clergy also proved a tempering influence. Clerics developed the Greek school system and helped disseminate Greek culture and language, but, until the beginning of the twentieth century, church higher-ups opposed the propagation of pan-Hellenic nationalism as “irresponsible.” Joachim III, who served as Greek Orthodox patriarch between 1878 and 1884 and again from 1901 until 1912, feared that the spread of nationalism would undermine the position of the patriarchate and bring catastrophe down on the Ottoman Greeks. But younger members of the fin de siècle Church brass—such as Chrysostomos and Germanos, the future bishops of Smyrna and Amasya, respectively—supported the Great Idea.⁴⁵

Still, the spread of Greek nationalism in Asia Minor was slow and hesitant.⁴⁶ As evidence, consider that between the 1820s’ Greek War of Independence—which might have provoked strong irredentist tendencies—and the fall of Abdülhamid in 1909, Ottoman Greeks and Turks managed largely to avoid confrontation.⁴⁷ In 1863 the British consul in Smyrna predicted as much. “The appeal to arms will not have much impression upon the minds of the [Greek] subjects of the Porte,” he anticipated.⁴⁸ Greek nationalism in Asia Minor may have appealed to “the most enlightened and liberal . . . the medical, legal and literary” professionals and to the rising middle class, especially in large cities and provincial towns. But it was opposed by the “ancient [Greek] nobility, the superior clergy, the lay dignitaries of the church, and the wealthy merchants.”⁴⁹ Whatever the extent of nationalism’s hold on Ottoman Greeks at the end of the nineteenth century, it failed to stir concrete political activism.

The trajectory of Ottoman Armenians would prove different. Armenian nationalism was in its own way nurtured by outsiders, such as American missionaries. But it was motivated by domestic exigencies, not by a foreign kingdom’s yearnings for a lost imperial glory. Whereas Greek nationalism was cultural and intellectual—wistful, even—Armenian nationalism was much

more immediate, galvanized by urban Armenians' growing awareness of the wretched conditions under which their rural brothers and sisters lived. One effect was a more conflictual relationship between the Ottoman state and Armenian nationalists than that between the state and Greek nationalists, resulting in the violence of the 1890s, years before the Turks systematically turned their guns on the Greeks in their midst.

We can trace the initial development of Ottoman Armenian nationalism to the Greek revolt of 1821. In response to that revolt, Constantinople stripped Ottoman Greeks of titles and official responsibilities. Much of their influence passed into the hands of the amiras. The amiras, in turn, used their increasing wealth and authority to foster partnerships with the Armenian Patriarchate in Constantinople: rich Ottoman Armenians would pay church expenses and invest in philanthropy and education, and, in return, the patriarchate would recognize the civil leadership of the amiras. Thus Pezciyan Amira, the director of the imperial mint, renovated the patriarchal headquarters; built schools, churches, and drinking fountains; and in 1833 Constantinople's Holy Savior Hospital. In recognition, the patriarch gave him the title of *azgapet*, designating the head of the community.⁴³ A similar situation prevailed in other cities, such as Smyrna.⁴⁴ The fifty or so exclusively Armenian *esnafs* of Constantinople also funneled money from guild taxes and donations to the church and the community, increasing their power and esteem. Amiras and *esnafs* competed for community leadership and in 1834 elected a joint committee for the administration of the schools.⁴⁵

These efforts mark clear steps in the evolution of national consciousness. By committing their fortunes and influence to the concrete needs of Ottoman Armenians, amiras and other notables helped to demarcate a distinct civic community. In doing so, they asserted that Ottoman Armenians did not just pray to the same God and perform the same religious rites but also constituted a social grouping that cared especially for its own in this life. At the same time, the imprimatur of the church helped to universalize the elites' appeal, affirming their roles as leaders not just of particular guilds and geographically bound populations but of Armenians generally.

At this point, during the first decades of the nineteenth century, there was still no Armenian independence movement. At most, elites sought a stronger sense of community and additional civil liberties, perhaps culminating in

equality with their Muslim neighbors. But the growth in civil leadership was the beginning of an important shift in power that facilitated nationalist ideas: away from the patriarchate and toward lay authorities.

This shift was reinforced by the fracturing of the Armenian religious community, which had begun some years before the rise of the amiras. Starting in the late eighteenth century, various Catholic clerics attempted to reunite the Armenian Church—also known as the Apostolic or Gregorian Church—and the Catholic Church, from which it had parted in the fifth century.⁴⁶ After a small group of Armenians aligned itself with the Vatican, Pope Benedict XIV formally recognized the Armenian Catholic Church. In 1829 the sultan gave Catholic Armenians permission to form a separate millet and to appoint archbishops of their own in Constantinople and Lebanon. In 1867 the two sees would be united, with a patriarchal residence established in the capital alongside the Gregorian Patriarchate, emphasizing the widening religious divisions within the Ottoman Armenian community.⁴⁷

At about the time the Catholic Armenian millet was formed, Protestant missionaries began making inroads among Gregorian Armenians. The sultan probably would have preferred to keep these outsider missionaries away from his subjects, but there was little he could do to prevent their admission. Caught in a tangle of geopolitical fears, debts, and strategic commitments to European patrons, the Ottoman elite was forced to acquiesce in these foreign inroads. Thus, in the 1774 Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, the tsar was recognized as the official protector of all Orthodox communities in the Ottoman Empire. Soon afterward France, the Ottomans' main European strategic partner, was allowed to intercede on behalf of the empire's Catholics; the French frequently represented Catholic interests in the Holy Land and Lebanon. The missionary presence would grow substantially, especially after the Crimean War. All the government could do was ban the missionaries from targeting Muslims. As long as the missionaries preached only to Jews and other Christians, the Ottoman authorities regarded them with benevolent disdain.

The first Protestant missionaries were Anglicans admitted in the 1820s as a condition of Britain's agreement to provide Sultan Mahmud military assistance. In the early 1830s, the Anglicans were joined by Americans sent by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. The missionaries organized parishes, built churches, and established networks of schools,

hospitals, welfare institutions, and small industries throughout the empire, with a focus on the Turkish heartland.⁴⁸

This missionary activity caused a crisis in the Armenian community, as the Gregorian Patriarchate excommunicated the converts to Protestantism. Some of the new Protestants were forced out of their guild jobs or trades. But two Tanzimat edicts, in 1847 and 1850, came to the converts' aid by sanctioning freedom of conscience and recognizing the Armenian Protestants as a new millet, with a status akin to that of the Gregorians. The consequence was continuing growth in the Protestant element and growing divisiveness in the community as a whole. In the eastern provinces, where most Armenians lived, there were about 1,300 Protestants in the 1860s. By 1914 there were some 50,000 Protestant Armenians in the empire, most of them in eastern Anatolia.⁴⁹

The rise of Armenian Catholicism and Protestantism pushed the Gregorian Patriarchate toward reform. The Gregorian Patriarchate had traditionally invested little in education, but as dissentients multiplied, it responded by establishing schools and colleges—with the aid of the amiras. Thus, in the process of asserting itself as spiritual leader, the patriarchate turned to civic institutions, further empowering them. At the same time, Tanzimat reforms were elevating a civic sphere understood as explicitly distinct from religious authority. Some of the new legal structures reduced the autonomy and prerogatives of traditional religious-ethnic leaders. For example, Armenian patriarchs were banned from exiling community members and inflicting corporal punishments. And in 1840 the Armenian millet was required to establish a council comprising four clerics and four amiras to conduct the millet's affairs and represent it in dealings with the government. Although the council was appointed by the patriarch, it formalized power-sharing between religious and lay leaders.⁵⁰ This was followed by the 1847 imperial edict, which also ordered the heads of the millets to elect two separate and independent governing bodies, one civil and the other spiritual.

The new civic leadership, referred to as the Armenian National Assembly, took its role seriously. In 1853 it founded the first Armenian Educational Council, administered not by clerics but by fourteen lay graduates of European universities. Directing its efforts toward Armenian language reform, the publication of Armenian literature, and the study of Armenian history, the

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council contributed perhaps more than any other institution to the growing sense of national identity. In its first year, the council published an Armenian grammar book by Nahapet Rusinian, one of the drafters of the eventual Armenian national constitution. The publication sought to replace the archaic ritual syntax and lexicon with a modernized vernacular. The patriarch tried, and failed, to ban Rusinian's book and to bring the budding printing industry under his control.

While Armenian communal leadership was taken over by the laity, the younger generation increasingly came into contact with Western ideas. This was due in part to interaction with missionaries, who helped to inculcate liberal and democratic values. Exposure to Western ideas was also facilitated by the Ottoman government itself, which, during the reform-minded 1830s, began sending batches of hand-picked students, including Christians, to France for schooling. Two decades later, under Sultan Abdülmecid, an Ottoman school was established in Paris to prepare the future elite to meet the challenges of the modern world. The government also revamped Constantinople's Galatasaray School, which educated the empire's bureaucrats. The curriculum was "modernized" to match European standards, with French installed as the language of instruction.⁵¹ In 1863 a new American missionary institution, Robert College, was established in the heights over the Bosphorus. The college soon developed into one of the city's first universities, accepting students of all denominations.⁵²

The first Christian students to go west were Catholic Armenians who studied medicine in Italy. Gregorian Armenians preferred France and Switzerland, where many studied science or engineering. Others focused on architecture, banking, and economics. Almost all were influenced by Auguste Comte's new, quasi-scientific ideas of positivism; by the humanistic concepts espoused by Alphonse de Lamartine and Victor Hugo; and by Jules Michelet's history of France, which emphasized nationalism. In the intellectual ferment leading up to the revolution of 1848 in France, the sons of amiras, guild members, and clerics of multiple Christian denominations studied together, breaching traditional social boundaries and creating a new type of bond based on ethnicity and language.⁵³ Young Armenians—and Greeks—learnt ancient history and debated constitutionalism and popular representation.

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was rejected by the Ottoman government, which claimed that it set the stage for a state within a state. A final draft, endorsed by the Armenian community and the Ottoman government, was approved in 1860 and ratified in 1863.⁵⁸ It provided for a refurbished 140-seat assembly with 80 members from Constantinople and its environs, 20 from the clergy, and 40 from the provinces. Although rural areas were grossly under-represented, they did at least have some presence, demonstrating the growing recognition of their membership alongside urbanites in an Armenian community whose boundaries extended across Anatolia. The patriarch was designated head of the community but in effect stripped of his lay powers, emphasizing the distinctively national, as opposed to religious, quality of the emerging Armenian people.⁵⁹ The Jewish and Greek communities also formulated constitutions, but with the chief rabbi left in charge of his people and the Greek clergy retaining many of the sorts of privileges that the Armenian Patriarchate lost.⁶⁰

In Armenian the document was entitled *The National Constitution of the Armenians*; in Turkish, *The Regulations of the Armenian Millet*. In the Armenian text, the assembly was referred to as the *National General Assembly*; the word "National" was omitted from the Turkish version. Nonetheless, as Kamuran Gurun, a Turkish diplomat and historian of the early republic put it, the document was designed to create a "landless autonomy."⁶¹ But the Armenian nation had not yet fully coalesced. For, as we have seen, rural communities, though recognized, were not totally embraced. And while the constitutional system enabled further autonomy and opportunity for minority communities in the capital, it had little impact on the beleaguered peasants.

A Rural Community under Siege

During the 1860s the situation of the peasants in the east deteriorated further. For roughly a century, more and more Muslim groups from outside the empire had settled the region, leading to tensions with Christians. The government established an Immigration Commission (*Muhâcirin Komisyonu*) to try to resolve problems, but to little avail.

Many of the Muslim settlers had been nomads, but during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they gradually became sedentary. Circassians and Chechens arrived from the Caucasus, where they were fleeing Russian armies.

ABDÜLHAMID II

On returning home from the Sorbonne, Rusinian sought to spread the idea of nationhood in his own society. Although professionally a medical man—in 1851 he became the personal physician of future-Grand Vizier Mehmed Fuad Pasha—he also published nationalist poems, essays on language, and Armenian translations of European classics.⁵⁴ In one poem, paraphrasing Frederic Berat's "My Normandy," Rusinian pined for the ancient Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia, which he equated with a modern homeland:

When the gates of hope are opened
And winter takes leave of our homeland,
When our beauteous land of Armenia
Beams its euphoric, delightful days;
When the swallow returns to its nest;
When the trees are clothed in leaves;
I yearn to see my Cilicia,
World that deluged me in eternal sun.⁵⁵

As educated Armenians began to think more in terms of national unity and a national home, they also started taking greater interest in the status of the fellow Armenians who would be their compatriots—in particular, those suffering in rural Anatolia. An important force in this regard was the Araratian Enkerutiun, or Ararat Society, a nonsectarian student organization founded in Paris in April 1849. Calling themselves the Young Armenians, they established the journal *Hayastan*—a medieval name for Armenia—which later became *Masis*, the Armenian name for Mount Ararat. The journal was the main mouthpiece of the Armenian cause from 1852 to 1907. The Ararat Society focused less on independence than on national identity, and much of its energy was spent on pan-Armenian efforts, crossing over urban-rural divides. In particular, the group hoped to bring education to Armenians and modern agricultural techniques to the peasants.⁵⁶

In June 1855 members of the Ararat Society—most had returned from Europe and were employed by the government—proposed that the Armenian assembly formulate a constitution. After debate, the assembly appointed a constitutional committee composed of members of the Young Armenian movement, lay leaders, and clergymen.⁵⁷ The first draft, completed in 1857,



Muhacirs—Muslim refugees—from the Balkans. Thousands flocked to western Anatolia in the wake of the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878.

Kurds and Turkmen were driven by political instability and government pressure in northern Iran. It has been estimated that during the "long nineteenth century" (1789-1914), five to seven million people immigrated to the empire and settled mainly in eastern and central Anatolia. They were joined also by thousands of Muslim refugees, known as *muhacirs*, from the Balkan wars.⁶²

As the population in the eastern and central regions grew, arable land became scarce, leading to disputes. Powerful clans took over cultivated fields and extorted tribute and bribes from local communities. The Christian peasantry were easy marks because the government had little interest in protecting them.⁶³ In some cases, clans bought from each other the right to tax Christian villages.⁶⁴ In the early 1860s a British consul traveling through eastern Anatolia sent London this grim description:

The Kochers and Koords are under very imperfect subjection, and it is only by satisfying all demands, however outrageous, that the Christian agriculturists can maintain their position. One unbearable custom, that

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of *kishlak*, has done more than anything else to contribute to their present paucity and decay. That custom, originating some years ago in the weakness of the Government and growing power of the Koords, enabled the latter to exercise the extraordinary right of quartering themselves and their flocks during winter in and about the Christian villages, entailing upon the inhabitants large expenses, not only for fodder for their animals, but also food and fuel for themselves, during at least four months.⁶⁵

Clashes erupted. In one instance in 1862, the government suppressed a brief rebellion in the mountainous region of Zeytun, whose Armenian peasants had a reputation for steadfastness.⁶⁶

As word of the injustices in the east flowed into a Constantinople community that increasingly saw itself as not just Gregorian but Armenian, the Ararat Society and its allies were moved to action. In 1870 they convinced the National General Assembly to appoint a commission to investigate the peasants' plight. But the commission would have little impact, as its interim report, submitted two years later to the Ottoman leadership, fell largely on deaf ears. The report mentioned illegal taxes but was carefully worded to overlook other injustices for fear of antagonizing the government, which was already annoyed by European demands to improve conditions in the east.⁶⁷

In 1876, during the government crisis in Constantinople, the assembly submitted a second report. This time, the commission was more thorough, detailing 320 cases of maladministration and oppression in the east. Most cases dealt with land seizures by local strongmen and tribal leaders. Many of the seizures were ascribed to recent Circassian arrivals; others were triggered by Kurdish, Afshar, and Turkmen tribes from Iran and Syria. In almost all instances, local authorities ignored or rejected Armenians' proofs of ownership. Provincial courts, disregarding the legal reforms prescribed by Constantinople, arbitrarily dismissed appeals. Even in cases where Armenian peasants produced solid documentary evidence, courts tended to rule in favor of Muslim expropriators.⁶⁸ The report also cited numerous incidents of extortion, theft, cattle rustling, and sexual assault on women. One of Britain's consular representatives in Van, a Mr. Rassam, wrote on October 15, 1877:

After making some allowance for the exaggerated reports regarding the sufferings of the Christian population in the vilayets of Diarbekir and Van, it cannot be denied that a good deal of misery has been caused in these parts from want of proper protection to life and property. The apathy and weakness of the local authorities, and the corruption of the collectors of taxes in the districts, have been the main cause of the present troubles. It seems that the [nomadic] Kurds . . . have never been properly brought under subjection, and as a matter of course, as soon as they found they could exact what they liked with impunity from those Christians who are in their power, they did so. . . . The highland Kurdish tribes from Diarbekir to Solaimania, are more or less unmanageable. They not only refuse to pay any taxes, or conform to the law of conscription, but they plunder and kill at their pleasure, and anyone who dares to deny them anything, he is sure to lose his life and property. . . . In many instances . . . Mahommedans suffered as well as Christians from the ravages of the Kurd.⁶⁹

Abdülhamid, newly installed as sultan, was perturbed by the details emerging from the far-flung provinces, where marauding tribes appeared to threaten his own power. He sent new governors, judges, tax collectors, and troops to reinforce his authority in the eastern vilayets, but not to improve the lot of the Christian peasants. Indeed, the effect was the opposite, as the central government added a new layer of misery. Now peasants would be fleeced three or four times: by the tribal overlords and local officials who "protected" them, mafia-style; by new tribes moving into the area; and by military and civilian agents from the center.

The peasants gained little from their many payments. In the east transportation, communication, agricultural, and security infrastructure all were underdeveloped. What the state did invest in—railways, roads, telegraph technology, and water projects—seldom benefited the peasants directly. To the contrary, peasants were forced to leave their homes unguarded and fields unworked while they were conscripted to take part in construction. In some areas, such as around Lake Van, the situation became so unbearable that thousands of Christian peasants abandoned their lands and migrated to Russia.⁷⁰

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Throughout the late 1870s, further appeals forwarded to the government by the patriarchate and assembly were largely ignored.⁷¹ Instead the authorities and banks confiscated land from peasants who failed to pay off debts. These lands were often given to the Circassian and Kurdish immigrants who, being Muslim, were considered more loyal to the state. Kurdish notables, appointed to advisory committees of local and regional councils as part of the Tanzimat reforms, subverted even the few and half-hearted government efforts to improve the Armenians' circumstances.⁷²

All this was coupled with a religious awakening among Kurdish and other Sunni tribesmen, inspired by government-backed clerics. As part of its struggle against missionary activity, and in order to strengthen its base in the south-east, Constantinople sent religious scholars to preach "true" Islam to the tribes.⁷³ The government also increased investments in religious education in primary and secondary schools and established religious schools (madrasa). One result was a new generation of militant Kurdish preachers who saw Christians, at home and abroad, as eternal enemies of Islam. The tribal chiefs thereby gained divine justification for their persecution.⁷⁴

The Sublime Porte, of course, knew what was happening in the East and exploited matters to its own advantage—to impose its authority or at least garner additional taxes for its own coffers. In the pedantic Ottoman bureaucratic tradition, officials, police, and army units in the provinces reported every incident. Abdülhamid's military aides followed the situation closely, the peasants sent countless complaints, and European ambassadors constantly protested. But the sultan was unmoved. From his vantage point, the Armenians were part of a much larger problem: rebellion among subjects throughout the empire, encouraged by foreigners. What began with the Greeks had continued with the Serbs, who sought and won independence between the 1830s and 1860s. Rebellion continued as well in Lebanon in 1860, where agitating Christians won special autonomy, practically detaching their enclave from the empire. The late 1860s saw further uprisings in Herzegovina, Bosnia, and Crete. Revolution was also afoot in Bulgaria. The Armenian provinces to the east seemed no different, especially in light of the patriarch's treasonous outreach to Russia, the reforms promised the Armenian vilayets in the 1878 Berlin Treaty, and an Armenian National General Assembly pleading the peasantry's case.

For the ambitious and somewhat paranoid Abdülhamid II, the creeping dis-
 violence and revolts proved that the Tanzimat reforms, tilted as they were
 toward ideas of equality and cultural autonomy, had been misguided. Their
 consequence was greater Christian influence in the empire and the empow-
 erment of secessionist minorities. Abdülhamid therefore renounced many of
 the reforms and refused to make good on liberalizing promises to outside
 powers.

But, to appease the powers, Abdülhamid played the diplomatic game. In
 1879, after it became clear that the Ottoman government was not introducing
 the reforms agreed to in the Treaty of Berlin, the British threatened war and
 sent a flotilla to the entrance of the Dardanelles. The Porte agreed to dispatch
 a commission of inquiry to the east. But nothing changed. Constantinople
 dragged its feet, arguing that, as a minority group, the Christians should not
 be given special status—and that, in any case, they were a source of instability.
 The government also contended that it could do little for Christians because
 Kurdish rights had to be protected.⁷⁶

The Reverend Herbert M. Allen, a missionary in Van vilayet, offers a good
 snapshot of conditions in the east. By his count, in the districts of Shadakh
 and Norduz alone, between eighty and one hundred Armenian villagers were
 murdered by Kurds in the decade preceding the massacres of the mid-1890s.
 "Hardly one of the murderers has been brought to justice," he added. The
 Kurdish tribes, he said, "subsist principally by preying on" Christian villages
 and could "kill and rob with impunity." One favored method was to take on
 debt with Armenian merchants and then refuse to pay them back. Emin Pasha,
 a Kurdish chieftain in the nearby Adilcevaz District, ran up a debt of 400
 pounds and then forced the lending merchant to write it off without payment.
 The merchant went to the authorities, to no effect. "These Kurds not only
 have carte blanche as to the property and lives of the Christians, but as to the
 sanctity of their homes as well," Allen reported. "In many villages no Chris-
 tian dares refuse his daughter, or wife, to a Kurd. In a village near Arcis, a cer-
 tain Dervish Bey ravishes women, in open daylight, in the presence of their
 husbands."

Such brazenness was possible because the vilayet's officials—from the vali,
 Bahri Pasha, down—allowed it. They were, Allen claimed, leading the prov-
 ince to "the verge of financial and moral ruin" and appeared especially bent

on "bringing ruin upon the Armenians as fast as possible." When an honest
 or efficient official arrived, the vali and his colleagues made sure he was dis-
 missed. Van's courts, Allen wrote, "are places where under a legal name, the
 most shameless and heartless injustice is perpetrated."

According to Allen's calculations, each of the fifty-one Armenian villages
 in Shadakh and Norduz was compelled to pay the government, on average,
 10,949 piastres per year in taxes "or turn Moslem." In addition, each village
 paid local Kurdish agas 2,690 piastres and another 1,000 piastres in tribute to
 "Shakir, the brigand chief." The hundred Kurdish villages paid almost no
 taxes. Christians provided "five-sixths" of the vilayet's revenues, which paid
 officials' salaries and for "building Turkish mosques and sustaining Turkish
 schools." At the same time, basic infrastructure in Armenian areas languished.
 "The roads are never repaired," Allen wrote. "Is it any wonder that in three
 years more than two hundred families have moved away?"⁷⁸

The Radicalization of the Armenian National Movement

In 1878 the sultan overturned the reformist constitution enacted just two
 years before, dissolving the parliament and undermining many of the gains
 minorities—and even the Sunni majority—had enjoyed. In short order, the
 Armenian National General Assembly became a hollow edifice without au-
 thority even in the Constantinople community. One by one the privileges of
 the lay leadership were stripped away. They were barred from making au-
 tonomous decisions about school curricula and community taxation. The
 teaching of Armenian history and display of Armenian historical images
 were banned. Outspoken newspapers were closed, and the General Union
 of Armenian Schools, established by the National General Assembly several
 years earlier, was abolished. The sultan was restoring the pre-Tanzimat status
 quo, in which millet autonomy would be largely spiritual in nature, with civil
 authority entirely in the hands of the state.

Proving, as ever, that their interest in the Ottoman situation lay in geopolitics
 rather than protecting the persecuted, the outside powers did little to object.
 Bismarck, who had been a major player in the Berlin Treaty, congratulated
 the sultan for dissolving the parliament and advised him to prioritize the sur-
 vival of the empire.⁷⁷ And, as we have seen, the British only made noises

about enforcing Article 61. They backed off as soon as the Sultan promised to investigate reports of persecution in the east.

Small wonder, then, that some young Armenians abandoned the idea of autonomy within a reformed empire and looked for more radical solutions. Early stirrings of an organized national movement could be seen in the platforms and manifestoes of groups such as the Black Cross Society and the Armenakan Party, established in Van in 1878 and 1885 respectively, and the Protectors of the Fatherland, formed in Erzurum in 1881.⁷⁸ In 1887 a group of Russian-Armenian students in Geneva founded the first nationalist political party, the Social Democrat Hunchakian Party, better known as Hunchak (meaning "bell" or "clarion"). Armenian youths from Constantinople and Anatolia were quick to join and take leadership positions. Although missionaries publicly opposed revolutionary activity, Protestant Armenians teaching at Anatolia College in Merzifon, such as Karabet Tomayan and Ohanes Karayan, also became covert Hunchak leaders.⁷⁹ Influenced by Marxism and the populist anti-tsarist group Narodnaya Volya, the Hunchaks adopted violent tactics widespread among the era's Russian movements. The Hunchaks' strategy was to pursue ideological indoctrination and train the masses for revolt whenever an opportune moment, such as a future Ottoman-Russian war, arrived.⁸⁰

Three years later, another group of Armenians, based in Tiflis, founded the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, better known as Dashnaksutyun ("Federation") or simply Dashnak. Their aim was to unite under one roof the various groups of Armenian nationalists and revolutionaries in Russia and the Ottoman Empire. The two parties, Hunchak and Dashnak, tried to work together, but, though the ideological differences between them were slight, they split on tactics. While the Hunchaks had no faith in the possibility of Ottoman reform, the Dashnaks believed that working together with opposition and progressive elements within the empire might lead to better prospects for Armenians. The two movements would become competitors for leadership of the national movement and in resisting the Ottoman authorities.⁸¹

Soon after they were established, the two parties began to attack Ottoman targets. From bases in the Caucasus and northern Iran, they hit troops, gendarmerie bases, and police posts and assaulted Kurdish bands believed to have perpetrated crimes against Armenian villagers. One of their aims was to

provoke the authorities to take harsh countermeasures that would trigger European intervention.⁸² These rebels sent operatives into rural Anatolia to indoctrinate Armenians and sow subversion. Armed bands installed themselves in the mountains, close to Armenian villages. Here and there, villagers joined them; others were persuaded to stop paying taxes and confront the authorities. Acts of resistance mounted.⁸³ Arms were smuggled from Russia into Anatolia, though the number was probably small and vastly inflated in Ottoman propaganda. Revolutionaries extorted from wealthy Armenians and murdered internal enemies. The authorities reacted with a heavy, indiscriminating hand, and "many of the law-abiders were persecuted by the government for [allegedly] conniving at a revolt."⁸⁴

The increasing assertiveness and scope of the Armenian independence movement during the 1870s—embracing both western cities and eastern provinces—frightened not just the Ottoman state but also the rural tribes that enriched themselves at Armenian expense. Following Berlin, Kurdish and Turkmen tribal leaders began to worry that the eastern provinces would ultimately fall under Armenian rule. In 1879 this concern triggered a rebellion along the Ottoman-Persian border. Led by a Kurdish chief, Sheikh Ubeydullah, the rebels believed that the moment was ripe for the Kurds to take control in a region under weak Iranian and Ottoman governance. Mistakenly thinking that the uprising was aimed at Iran only, the Ottomans initially supported Ubeydullah and his band. But the state soon recognized the danger and sent in the army. The Kurds took to the hills, and southeastern Anatolia descended into chaos. Muslim peasants who had only recently come under the government's sway refused to pay taxes, and communications were disrupted. Disarray also plagued the northern frontier, where Russia allowed Cossack militias free rein. The Cossacks frequently mounted cross-border raids against Muslim communities and effectively pushed the international boundary southward.⁸⁵

The sultan realized that the old tactics—sending troops to quash local tax rebellions, delaying reform, installing sham commissions of inquiry, reneging on promises to the powers—were no longer sufficient. A comprehensive solution was needed, one that would respond to the deteriorating situation across the empire.⁸⁶ The answer the sultan found was sectarianism, a policy of political Islam that would replace the multiethnic commitments and religious

abolition of Ottomanism. The idea was that, by explicitly and unapologetically favoring Muslims and elevating their status, the sultan would win the loyalty of some Muslim tribes. Ideally, they would stop pressuring the state and also do the sultan's bidding in the marchlands they shared with the Armenians.⁹¹

Thus in 1891 the authorities formed the Hamidiye Light Cavalry Regiments (*Hamidiye hafif süvari alayları*), composed mainly of Kurds and Turkmens. They were equipped with guns and horses, given a command structure, dressed in military-style uniforms, and allotted state salaries.⁹² (Officially the units were tasked with defending the border and combating Russian encroachment; their job was "to incorporate or at least to neutralize the non-state spaces" that the state "could claim, but perhaps not yet govern."⁹³ But the way the regiments were deployed mainly in areas of Armenian concentration, suggesting that the government had one particular set of disobedients in mind.⁹⁴

Regardless of their stated purpose, the Hamidiye would go on to join in the massacre of Armenians. Kurdish commanders understood that suppressing Armenians was their mission. In his memoirs, Sadettin Pasha, who was governor of Van vilayet after the Hamidian massacres, recalled a particular conversation. On his way to his new posting, he had reprimanded a group of Kurdish Hamidiye officers for excessive zeal and disobeying orders. The Kurds responded that controlling the Armenians was their duty, that Armenian insubordination and insurrections were a blow to their honor as soldiers of the sultan, and that a firman (imperial edict) had made seizure of Armenian property halal, a religiously permissible act. Denying that such a firman had been issued—in fact, it probably had not—Sadettin Pasha admonished the Kurds to respect the chain of command.⁹⁵

The establishment of the regiments further radicalized the eastern Armenians. Although the revolutionaries were still just a tiny fraction of the populace, many villagers now came to believe that the Hunchak and Dashnak diasporas were accurate. The battle lines had been drawn, with the Kurds (briefly) made favorite sons and Armenians cast as enemies of the state, their oppression loudly permitted and sometimes actively encouraged. For the Kurds, this meant official recognition of their local power, state medals and honors, and a set of privileges that often entailed *carte blanche* to appropriate land held by

Nationalist Awakenings

Armenians for centuries. (Ironically, it was also a first step on the road toward the Kurdish independence movement that, to this day, resists the Turkish state.⁹⁶)

Abdülhamid was to rule the empire as absolute monarch for thirty-two years, until he was deposed following the Young Turk Revolution of 1908. During his reign, Armenian autonomy all but vanished.⁹⁷

The Massacres of 1894-1896

By early 1894 mass murder was in the air, and by mid-1896 at least 100,000 Armenians lay dead—shot, stabbed, and axed to death by Turks and Kurds in a succession of horrific massacres. More died through starvation and exposure in the weeks and months that followed, an indirect result of the destruction of their homes, the confiscation of their property, and the wholesale murder of breadwinners. Some historians put the total death toll as high as 300,000.

The Turks then and later largely blamed so-called Armenian revolutionists for what had happened, even as they denied that it in fact had happened. There were no massacres, the Turks claimed. Only Armenian attacks or "battles" between Armenians and Muslims.

Western observers often criticized the Turks, but they were not uncritical of Armenian behavior. They blamed supposed Armenian revolutionaries, on three counts: they promoted murder—mainly of informers, but also, on occasion, of Turkish police and officials; they provoked Turkish responses, which included mass imprisonment and massacre; and they caused Ottoman antagonism toward Westerners, who were believed to be supporting and inciting the Armenian "cause." In particular, the Ottomans were upset at American missionaries, of whom there were 176 in 1895, working with locals to run 125 churches and 423 schools with more than 20,000 pupils.¹ "The Government did not like to have foreigners going about among the people," one official said.²

But foreign influence was only a small factor in the instability in the eastern provinces. It stemmed in large part from the triangular relationship between

The Massacres of 1894-1896

Armenians, Kurds and other tribal groups, and Ottoman officials, which admitted economic envy and covetousness, religious antagonism, disputes over disparate traditions, and an Armenian revolutionary frisson that was vastly exaggerated in Muslim minds.

Since 1876 routine depredation had steadily impoverished rural Armenians.³ The court system, police, and prisons figured large in this system of debasement and exactions. Armenians were punished for resisting Kurdish raiders, parrying extortion, or trying to obtain payment when coerced into lodging Muslims.

The palace was well aware of the Armenians' plight but did very little to alleviate it. The palace received a stream of reports from the provinces about these depredations. Osman Nuri, Sultan Abdülhamid's biographer, later conceded that "there were a few things which caused the conflict between the Armenians and the Muslims. [These included] the aggression of the Kurds and the corruption of the local officials." Disappointed by the state's failure to implement any semblance of reform, some Armenians pinned their hopes on the great empire to the north, but the Russians were reluctant to interfere directly and even quietly supported the formation of a Kurdish confederation, which they hoped eventually to place under their own tutelage.⁴

Van missionary Herbert Allen related an occasion in early 1895 when gendarmes came to the village of Kurubaş to collect taxes: "After gorging themselves with all they could get out of the villagers, they demanded a certain woman. . . . Finally [she was given] up to the lust of these shameless brutes." A few weeks earlier, tax-collecting gendarmes arrived in the district of Müküs. An Armenian who could not pay was shut up in a room full of smoke. He was "told that if he would become a Moslem they would release him." He refused "and before many hours he was dead. Seeing his fate, nine others, including women and children, were frightened into declaring that they would become Moslems."

If the police were bad, the prisons were even worse. In these overcrowded, "vile dens," Christians received "no food except bread from the Government." Food sent by relatives was plundered by the guards. Christians regularly died in the cells from poison, disease ("no medicine allowed"), beatings, and torture. The experience of Mesak Shadvorean, a Van Armenian, is illustrative. In 1893 he was arrested with seven family members for the murder of a

policeman. Mesak and a son died from beatings; another son was hanged a year later. Another Armenian, one Yeghiazar Pambagisian, "was kept chained in a dungeon in winter weather till his feet froze, and finally the toes of both dropped off."⁵ Muslim prisoners were probably not treated much better.

In early 1895, months before the large wave of massacre swept eastern Anatolia, the local British consul described the situation in one Van district: "The oppressions, murders, and forcible proselytizing in the district of Mukus . . . would fill a volume. . . . This district has been all but emptied of its Christian inhabitants. The taxes of those who have moved away are demanded of those who remain although their fields have been all seized by the Kurds. Those who remain are . . . beaten, imprisoned, and wish to emigrate, but are prevented from doing so and turned back to die in their desolate homes."⁶

Occasional Armenian resistance to raids, or reluctance to pay officials were interpreted, or at least designated, by Ottoman administrators as rebellion. Indeed, these were seen as violations of the natural order and unconscionable *lese-majesté*: resisting oppression, passively or actively, however ineffectually and minutely, challenged the political and religious status quo and threatened or seemed to threaten the sultan's primacy, honor, and manliness. Such thinking was linked to religious views and *sharia* law, which, as one Western observer put it, using a term for Christian subjects of the Ottoman regime, "prescribes that if the '*rayah*' Christians attempt . . . to overstep the limits of privileges (*berat*) their lives and property are to be forfeited, and are at the mercy of the Mussulmans. To the Turkish mind the Armenians had tried to overstep those limits by appealing to foreign Powers. They therefore considered it their religious duty and a righteous thing to destroy and seize the lives and property of the Armenians."⁷ It appears that in the early 1890s there was a rise in religious tempers, probably generated in part by the Islamist winds blowing from Abdülhamid's Constantinople. In Maraş, for instance, it was reported that "Muslim fanaticism" had grown into a "fierce . . . passion."⁸

There were, by then, Armenian nationalist parties, but most Western observers, and Armenians themselves, attributed their emergence not to a collective revolutionary impulse but rather to despair following the complete failure of the government to implement the Treaty of Berlin reforms.⁹ A British diplomat explained that local officials believed that it was in their interest "to

maintain the friction [*sic*, fiction] of a perpetual Armenian agitation, which is only prevented from breaking out into open revolt by their zealous efforts." Moreover, these officials understood "that any act of oppression or injustice towards Armenians will be overlooked, if not actually rewarded, by their superiors, an idea which has also taken root and borne fruit among the Kurds of the country districts."¹⁰

There also were acts of violence by Armenians, but neither Turkish officials nor the masses looked beyond their stereotypes about ethnic-religious collectives: the actions or thinking of a few Armenians in specific places were attributed to all Armenians. As one British diplomat put it, "The Ottoman officials, instead of distinguishing between the guilty and innocent, chose, some from ignorance, many from motives of personal pecuniary gain, to regard all Armenians as traitors, scheming to throw off the Ottoman yoke."¹¹

In the story Ottoman officials told themselves, revolutionaries and "agitators" had infiltrated from Russia or Persia and were preparing for "the day." Alternatively, Armenian revolts might coincide with war with Christian powers along Turkey's borders, in the Caucasus or the Balkans. Or a revolt could serve as an excuse for, and trigger of, cross-border offensives by Christian powers bent on aiding Christians. The fear among Turkish officials was very real, even if the potential or reality of Armenian revolution were not.

The Ottomans therefore reacted harshly to even whiffs of sedition, and tended to blame Christians without evidence. For example, when, in 1892 and early 1893, seditious posters appeared on walls in Amasya, Merzifon, Tokat, Yozgat, Ankara, and Diyarbakir, the authorities responded with mass arrests. One poster read, "The last days have approached of Abdül-Hamid, the tyrant, who has soiled the sacred Throne of Osman and rendered the religion of Islam detestable. . . . The moment of vengeance has arrived."¹² Armenians—who would not likely criticize the regime in Islamist terms—said the posters were hung by *softas* (Muslim seminarians), who disliked the regime. Alternatively, discontented local ex-officials may have hung them in order to inflame Turkish sentiment against Christians. Whatever the case, the authorities used the posters to crack down on the Armenians. The British consular agent in Samsun, Alfred Spadaro, spoke in early 1893 of 1,800 Armenians arrested in the eastern and central provinces of Asia Minor. Others thought the real number was about half that.¹³

Although the Ottomans routinely upbraided the outside powers for undermining their authority, many bought into the idea that Christians were rebelling with the aid of foreign powers. After meeting with Ankara Vali Abidin Pasha, Robert Windham Graves, the British "consul for Kurdistan," agreed that "a widespread movement of disaffection existed among the Armenians in this province, and that of Sivas, having its centre in Marsovan." The movement was "financed and inspired from abroad" and had recruited "a number of adherents, mostly young and ignorant hotheads of the lower classes." They had been responsible for violence against government informers and other targets. Abidin produced a detained Armenian who said, according to Graves, that "the intention of the movement was . . . to cause such disturbances in the country as should attract attention to the oppressed condition of his fellow-countrymen, and compel the interference of Foreign Powers." Graves praised the vali and noted that Christian prisoners were "treated with humanity."¹⁴

But within weeks Graves was skeptical about "the genuineness of the supposed insurrectionary movement" in the two provinces he had toured. The Armenians, he wrote, "had no special grievances," and "everything points to the fact that an insurrectionary movement was never seriously intended, the design really being to create an appearance of revolt and disorder for the purpose of attracting attention and provoking foreign interference." Graves said that a revolutionary committee had put up placards and recruited supporters in the two provinces, but its outreach was largely unsuccessful. The "total number . . . joining the movement can[not] have exceeded a few hundreds," he wrote. The Turks managed quickly to stifle the movement with mass arrests. Graves thought the crackdown and occasional "misconduct" by the authorities partially "justified the complaints of persecution."¹⁵ He would soon become a severe critic of Ottoman behavior.

Most Western observers agreed with Graves's assessments. They recognized in Armenian nationalism not some wayward collective revolutionary impulse but an understandable response to oppressive conditions. These were supposed to be ameliorated by reforms. But the Sublime Porte failed to implement each of the successive schemes for reform. Instead the government became increasingly paranoid, attributing to all Armenians the rebellious actions of a few in isolated places. When Armenians acted up, they were usually refusing excessive taxation or resisting raiders, not revolting.

The Massacres of 1894-1896



"The Quarrelsome European Nursery." Emerging nationalist parties in the Balkans and Anatolia were sometimes seen as proxies of the squabbling European powers.

When considering the Ottoman actions of the mid-1890s, it is important to keep in mind both motivations and realities. Yes, Armenians in eastern Anatolia were buying small arms surreptitiously and by late 1893 there were revolutionary groups at work, with foreign agitators adding fuel to the fire. Christian missionaries sowed discontent merely by invoking and inculcating foreign modes of thought.¹⁶ But, for all that, the Armenian national movement posed no serious threat to Ottoman power—certainly nothing that could warrant the oppression they lived under and the slaughter that was to follow.

The Early Massacres

The underlying hatreds, fears and tensions of the early 1890s came to a head in late 1893 and early 1894 in two episodes that heralded the giant massacres of a few months later. In Yozgat and Sason (Sassoun), local officials and the Constantinople brass perceived a hint of Armenian assertiveness and a wish for equality. This "alarmed the Palace considerably."¹⁷ In both places, but especially Sason, local Muslims and the state responded with

unprecedented ferocity, demonstrating the lengths to which they would go to crush what they seemed to view as mortal threats.

Yozgat

The events immediately precipitating the bloodletting in Yozgat, in Ankara vilayet, began in November 1893, when an Armenian activist in the nearby village of Incirli (Indjirli) Keris killed an Armenian police informer.¹⁸ Fearing collective punishment, the villagers handed the killer over to the authorities. But after Armenians accused of involvement in an armed revolutionary committee freed the man from custody, gendarmes responded by ransacking the village. They robbed homes and arrested twenty "of the principal inhabitants." These men, unconnected to the supposed committee, were taken to Yozgat, imprisoned, and tortured to elicit confessions. The gendarmes beat them with chains, cut them with "blunt tin knives," inflated their intestines with bellows inserted a posteriori, and "squeezed" their testicles. An Ottoman commission subsequently freed thirteen of the prisoners, but seven had signed confessions and remained in jail.¹⁹

Then, in December, gendarmes raided another village, whose name appears in reports as Kara Chair. The gendarmes were looking for "committee men"—or, alternatively, men who had cut telegraph wires nearby—and briefly detained twenty villagers. While the men were in custody, the gendarmes and chief of police went to detainees' homes and there raped six or seven women, "three of whom were virgins." Several other young women also were raped. Although there was no evidence of crimes on the part of the detainees, fifteen of them were taken to jail in Yozgat. On December 12, after officials refused to talk to the villagers about the prisoners, the villagers met in a Yozgat church to decide what to do. During the meeting, the Kara Chair Armenians "excited the Yozgat Armenians to fury."

Muslims, including soldiers, surrounded the church. The district governor called on the crowd to disperse and promised the Armenians redress. When Armenians emerged from the church, a Turkish soldier fired, hitting an Armenian in the leg. Fearing impending massacre, Armenians fired back; three Muslims and an Armenian died, and dozens were injured. Thereafter Yozgat's Christian shopowners defied official "orders and entreaties" by

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closing down their businesses for two weeks in an effort to secure their goods from possible looting. Some Muslim-owned shops were shuttered as well. The military commandant, Osman Pasha, prevented Turkish "reprisals" against the Armenians. According to the local British consul, Henry Arnold Cumberbatch, these events had "no connection with any 'revolutionary' movement, as was at first suggested in some quarters."²⁰

After word of the mayhem reached Constantinople, the government sent a commission of inquiry to investigate. Led by Hilmi Pasha—whom a Protestant cleric described as "mild and civilized" but also a morphine taker, "indolent and addicted to drink"—the commission arrested dozens of Armenians. "The victims [were] apparently selected for their wealth or position or because some official bore them a grudge," a British report stated.²¹

Hilmi's commission never made much progress, in part because its work was soon overtaken by new emergencies. On February 1, 1894, Yozgat gendarmes attempted to arrest a man "for alleged treasonable language." In the course of his flight, he shot and wounded a local police commander. The authorities quickly caught up and arrested him. He was murdered by his jailers that same day. The following day, a crowd of soldiers and locals attacked Christian passersby, their homes, and Christian-owned shops, killing perhaps fifteen and wounding eighty. The majority of injuries were reportedly caused by bayonets, indicating the primary responsibility of soldiers. The riot continued from morning till sunset. Hearing the hubbub in the streets, Hilmi reportedly rushed out "into the snow . . . in a dressing gown and stockings and with a coffee cup in his hand" and asked whether "the Armenians were rising." After soldiers explained what was happening, Hilmi replied, "Thank god, I will finish my coffee" and returned to his rooms. The British ambassador, relating the incident, said that "no Turkish officers took part in the riot, but they did not attempt to restrain the rioters all day." In the course of the pogrom, some 200-300 Armenians were jailed, and several of these were murdered in prison. According to the ambassador, no Muslims were killed, hurt, or imprisoned.²²

The tumult was brought to an end on orders from Hilmi. The wounded were taken to prison "and kept there till they recovered or died." Armenian civilian doctors were barred from attending; the injured were instead treated by Turkish military doctors. Martial law was proclaimed, and Hilmi left town

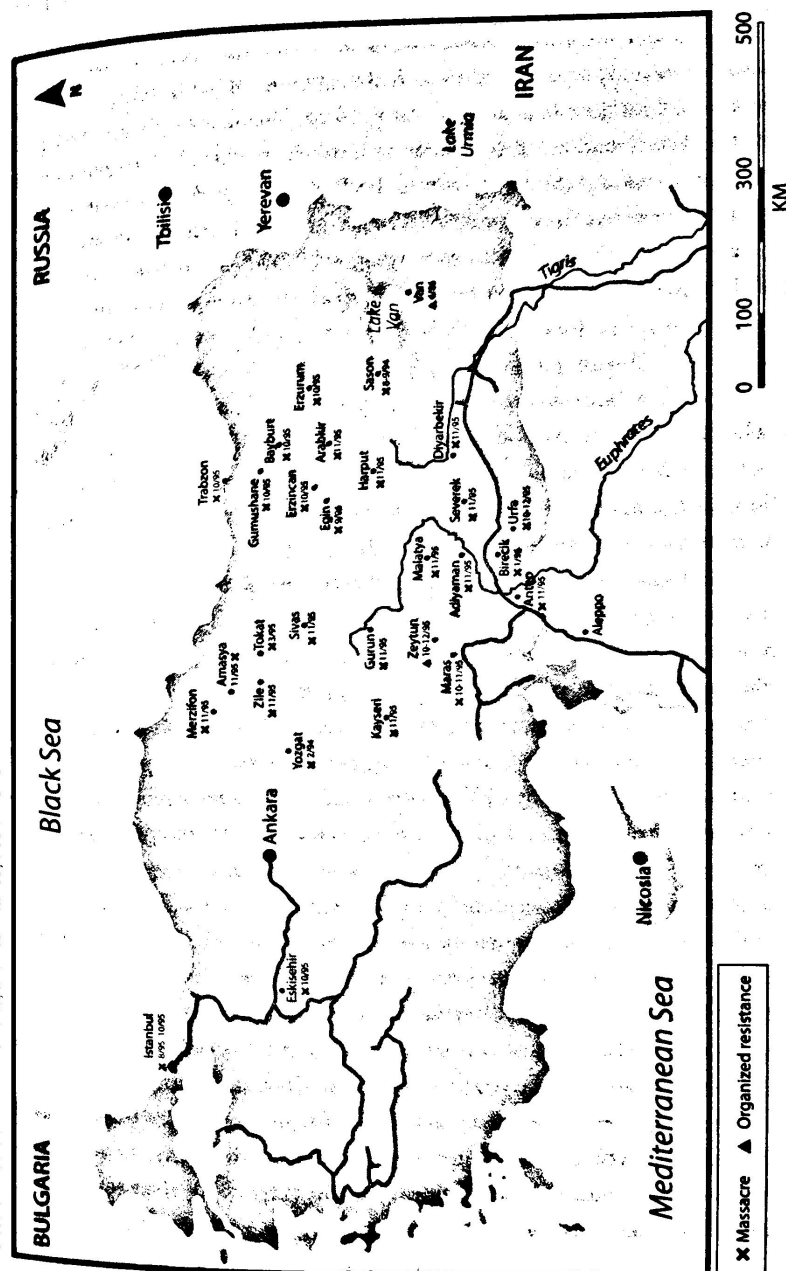
the next morning without investigating the riot or completing the inquiry into the previous incidents.²³

That job would be left to a military court headed by Mustafa Pasha, whom British Ambassador Philip Currie described as "an exceedingly fanatical Turk." Mustafa freed a hundred of the prisoners taken during the pogrom, but the court was otherwise hostile to the Armenians, abusing them and ignoring their testimony. While the court addressed the events at Kara Chair, Incirli, and the Yozgat church, it overlooked the pogrom and its perpetrators. The women raped at Incirli were put on the stand, where the commission "spoke to them severely and in very coarse language." The three ex-virgins were "told . . . to describe the exact details. . . . The girls began to cry and said they could not tell a man of their own religion such things, much less Turkish officers, and one of them fainted." The married women "volunteered full details," but the court nonetheless ruled that "as the persons said to have been assaulted refused to confirm the details, there was no case."²⁴ Although no Turks were brought to justice, several dozen Armenians were tried for crimes related to these events.²⁵

The proceeding was a farce. Witnesses present in court later said that the judges intimidated, reprimanded, and harangued Armenian witnesses as infidels. "You see the Islamic nation is great," one judge proclaimed in the midst of the trial. According to Western reports, Muslims were cajoled to "bear false witness," the local mufti having issued a fatwa declaring it "lawful to kill, assault, and falsely accuse" men who oppose the government.²⁶ Sentences were carried out in April: one Armenian was hanged, fifteen more were condemned to death, and three dozen were given long prison terms.²⁷

The incidents in and around Yozgat deepened the conviction among Ottoman officials and the Muslim public that Armenians presented a revolutionary threat. Hearts and minds were conditioned for violence—whether preemptive strikes against Armenians or vengeance following seemingly inevitable rebellion. In February the American consul in Sivas, Dr. Milo A. Jewett, raised the alarm. He warned his superior Alexander Watkins Terrell, the American minister in Constantinople, of "rumors" concerning a "contemplated assassination of the Christians at Sivas."²⁸ To the British consul in Trabzon, Henry Z. Longworth, Jewett wrote of an impending "massacre": "notables . . . plotting an attack upon Christians." Jewett had obtained the names of the

Sites of Massacre of Armenians, and Resistance, 1894-1896



plotters, "fanatical and unprincipled men," including Nuri Bey, the mayor. Jewett further reported that the vali had angrily declared, "I will outrage the mother of these giaours or they will outrage mine." In other words, as Jewett put it, "I will crush and ruin these infidels or be ruined by them." He also reported "a similar plot at Cesarea [Kayseri]." Back in Sivas, Jewett observed Turks walking the streets "heavily armed." The garrison had received "new arms and ammunition," and gendarmes were going about with "two belts full of cartridges," contrary to "the usual custom," apparently of one cartridge belt.²⁹

Sason

The injustice in Yozgat had largely been perpetrated by Turkish officials and soldiers; in Sason, in Bitlis vilayet, local tribes joined in. Together these Muslims perpetrated the first large-scale massacre of Anatolian Christians during the 1894-1896 period.

According to Currie, Sason was "wild and mountainous," "poor," and "the worst-governed" independent district in the empire. The Armenians lived under the thumb of a Kurdish majority who "exercise a sort of feudal authority." Armenian villagers, "their vassals," paid an annual tribute to the Kurds, above and beyond the taxes they owed, and often paid, to the government. Though oppressed, the local Armenians were a proud people, "fierce and warlike" and "hardly distinguishable from their Kurdish neighbours."³⁰ An American missionary considered these Armenians "an exceptionally hardy, brave set."³¹

Armenian-Kurdish relations in the Sason area were often described as amicable.³² After the massacre in Sason was over, a Kurdish chieftain lamented the loss of "love and perfect confidence" that had prevailed "for hundreds of years between us and the Christians." In a petition to the great powers, he wrote of a kind of paternalistic bond. "Peace and safety existed among us, so that though each one of us owned a Christian, and every year exacted a fixed amount for protection afforded, yet we cared for them more than [for] our own children, and if they suffered oppression and injustice from any one, we would labor for them to the extent of sacrificing our very life for the love of them, and this cannot be denied."³³

Armenians, however, did not see the situation as idyllic. One testified that Ottoman policy seemed geared toward "extermination, persecuting us in all sorts of ways and continually inciting neighboring Kurdish tribes against us. Taxes were arbitrarily raised to a most exorbitant rate and levied in a most tyrannical fashion." He added, "Besides, we had to pay tribute (in kind) to some seven different Kurd 'Ashirs,' or chieftains . . . and at the same time were continually exposed to their plunder, rape and murder."³⁴ The levies worsened with the arrival of additional tribes from Persia and Kurdistan. In the early 1890s, some villages, including Talori (Dalvoreeg or Talvori) and its satellites, refused to pay the government taxes, arguing that they could not afford the multiple charges and that the government was failing to carry out the basic task of providing security against marauders. Local officials designated this behavior subversive.³⁵

Whatever the historical relations between Sason's Armenians and the local tribes, during the two years leading up to the massacre, matters there had grown worse. Fearful of rebellion, troops and gendarmes had placed the area under a virtual "siege," preventing "intercourse with neighboring towns." An Armenian explained, "Our elders were constantly arrested, imprisoned and tortured and life was made generally unbearable—all under pretense of our being revolutionists." In summer 1893, after a severe two-year famine and after paying tribute to two local tribes and taxes to the government, the situation became "insupportable" when Kurdish tribes from Diyarbekir, the Badikanli and Bekiranli, entered the town and demanded additional tribute. When the Armenians refused, the Kurds raided nearby villages.³⁶ Armenians then mounted counter-raids.³⁷ At Talori, villagers fired at a nearby Kurdish encampment; the Kurds responded by sacking the village and driving the villagers to the nearby hills.³⁸ The government sent reinforcements, ostensibly to protect the villagers, but proceeded to arrest and torture Armenian notables, charging them with sedition. The soldiers' horses ate what little grain was available. In nearby Simal, Turks "hung Azo," a local Armenian notable, "by the feet from the ceiling . . . and literally covered his body, face, forehead and tongue with cruciform scars made with a red-hot iron." The villagers told Tahsin Pasha, the vali, that they could pay no further taxes unless he protected them from the Kurds. He instead demanded that they surrender their

weapons. They refused, "having no faith in the promises of the [Ottomans]." Thus matters stood at the end of 1893.⁴⁰

As the state became more suspicious, it turned to arresting alleged rabble rousers who had come to Sason. In 1894 officials detained two outsiders. One, Mihran Daghmation, called on the villagers to stand up for their rights and demand that Constantinople put an end to local misgovernment and Kurdish depredations. The other, Harmpartsoon Boagian, was a physician trained in Constantinople, Athens, and Geneva, who tried to teach Armenian villagers "not to sell their daughters in marriage" and to stand up to the Kurds.

But while outside agitators did play some role in Sason, contemporary reports suggest that the "desperate" villagers were poorly armed and had not rebelled.⁴¹ Indeed, it is clear from the evidence that the massacres that took place in Sason in August–September 1894 came in response to Armenian resistance to Turkish and Kurdish aggression; they were not a Turkish effort—even an overblown one—to stave off insurrection.⁴²

The immediate prelude to massacre came in July, when officials in nearby Muş, the seat of the district, were said to have "commissioned" a tribal leader, Sheikh Mehmet, to muster near Talori "large numbers" from the Diyarbekir region. A group of Kurds camped near Simal. Then, in August, the vali reportedly urged or ordered the tribesmen to attack.⁴³ The orders likely originated with Süreyya Bey, first secretary to Sultan Abdülhamid II, who sent explicit instructions to the army's commander in chief to "neutralize all bandits by force, no quarter to be given." This was interpreted by the Sason authorities as a license to kill.⁴⁴ Ottoman Army correspondence clarifies that the orders were to kill the men and spare women and children.⁴⁵ From Erzurum, Graves reported "I learn privately that the Ferik [lieutenant general], Edhem Pasha, while at Muş received telegrams from Zeki Pasha ordering the slaughter of Sason Armenians which he refused to obey. The execution of these orders then devolved upon [Colonel] Tewfik Bey."⁴⁶ Armenian witnesses testified that the Kurds were "saying among themselves" that they had received orders from the Ottoman authorities "to exterminate the Armenians."⁴⁷

In a post-massacre petition to the queen of England, thirty-nine local Kurdish chieftains, including leaders of the principal tribes engaged in the violence, also blamed Turkish officials. The chieftains wrote that Turkish officials

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"deceived us with fallacious arguments, saying 'The Christians are enemies of our religion. Do not allow their eyes to be opened. Give them no peace. Rob them of their property, seize and abduct their wives and daughters by force. Give false witness against them. For when they are left at ease they will ruin our land and religion.'"⁴⁸

The assaults on the Armenian villagers began on or around August 19 and lasted three weeks. The precipitating incident occurred in Simal, where Bekiranli Kurds raided the herds, killing a shepherd and carrying off a thousand head. Armenians gave chase and, after a firefight, retrieved the stolen animals. Two or three Kurds were killed. The Kurds brought the bodies to the authorities, apparently after mutilating them. The Kurds alleged that "the Armenians were up in arms and that there were foreigners among them instigating . . . revolt." An Ottoman commander backed them up.⁴⁹ In response, a missionary wrote, "The government secretly gave the Kurds carte blanche to do what they could to the Armenians."⁵⁰ The Kurds then demanded an indemnity in cash, which the Armenians said they could pay but only in kind. The Kurds refused, and attacked the next day.⁵¹

The first targets were the small villages of Ghelie Genneman and Alliantz. After destroying these, the Kurds moved on to Simal, Senik, and their satellites. These were wealthy, tax-paying villages. Most of the inhabitants fled to Geligüzan or into the hills, where they joined other villagers, who apparently had sought refuge there after local Kurds warned them of impending attacks on their homes.⁵²

At Geligüzan the Armenians beat back repeated Kurdish assaults. The Turks responded by sending in regulars and mountain guns from Diyarbekir, Van, Bitlis, and Erzurum to reinforce the Kurds. There may also have been several regiments of Hamidiye cavalry. Some reports say they bivouacked in Muş and never actually reached the killing fields, but instead ravaged nearby Armenian villages. Nominally Zeki Pasha, the *muşir* (general) of the 4th Army Corps, was giving the orders, though command in the field appears to have been exercised by Colonels Ismail Bey and Tewfik Pasha. According to a British diplomat, a Major Salih, of the Muş Battalion, was a prominent participant in the massacre.⁵³ In an effort to cover their traces, some government troops dressed as Kurds.⁵⁴ The Kurds were "constantly in and out of [the soldiers'] camp," one Turkish soldier later testified.⁵⁵

The resisting Armenians, women among them, eventually ran out of ammunition and fled to Mount Andok (Anduk Dağı) with Kurds and Turks on their heels.⁵⁶ "That night the sky was red with the flames of our burning homes," an Armenian fighter later recalled.⁵⁷ Hundreds, perhaps as many as two thousand, made it up Mount Andok, firing and rolling boulders down the slopes at their pursuers. But Turkish and Kurdish firepower and resolution gradually prevailed.⁵⁸ Within days, the Armenians collapsed. Some defenders were killed; some women, with their children, jumped to their deaths from the cliffs.⁵⁹ Other Armenians managed to escape and hid for weeks in forests and scrublands. Kurdish and Turkish troops scoured the area for survivors, usually killing them on the spot. One survivor later described her ordeal:

When the Kurds came on us, I . . . tried to escape with 3 other women (two being aunts of my husband) but, there being no time, we hastily hid ourselves amongst some thick bushes, where we were soon discovered by a band of 4 Kurds and 3 soldiers. We begged and implored for mercy. But they knocked us down with the butt-end of their guns and killed my three companions. Then a soldier snatched my three-months-old babe (a boy) from my arms and, in spite of tearful pleadings, threw him against a rock, then pierced him with his fixed bayonet and threw him up in the air. The other soldiers then cut him up into pieces. They then all fell on me, swearing and kicking, and knocking me down with the butt-end of their guns. One of the Kurds then, finding me young, decided to take me with him. But I refused to follow him and become a Mohammedan. They threatened and tortured me and finally decided to kill me, but I was dressed in fine clothes, [so] they undressed me—so as not to soil them with my blood. When, in doing so, they discovered the gold coins in my head-dress and some thirty pounds in my belt, they immediately began to fight amongst themselves. Taking advantage of this opportunity I flew away through the dense brushwood. They fired after me but missed me. I hid myself and remained there all day, all night and all next day—trembling from fright, famished with hunger, and shivering from cold. . . . During the second night I ventured out and putting on some clothes which I got from the dead bodies of some women, I wandered through the forest

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in search of food and assistance. I then met an Armenian named Kaleh . . . and we managed to reach Khnoos.⁶⁰

Led by a priest, Der Hohanes Mardovan, about 400 men and women who had first fled to Mount Andok surrendered at Geligüzan in exchange for a guarantee of protection. They were "urged to accept Islam" but refused. On Colonel Ismail's orders, a soldier gouged out Mardovan's eyes. The mutilated priest then begged for his own death—"Let me die," he said—and was bayoneted, according to both a survivor and a soldier who witnessed the scene.⁶¹ In the days that followed the troops massacred many of the men who had returned to Geligüzan. Some reports speak of a single mass killing of about 40 villagers. Another describes hundreds systematically killed in batches of ten to twenty over a number of nights. All reports agree that the dead were dumped into one or more pre-dug trenches or pits and covered with earth.⁶²

A further massacre, by soldiers, appears to have taken place in the Ghelie San Ravine, five hours walk from Geligüzan. Hundreds of Armenians hid there.⁶³ Some were burnt to death, others hacked to pieces, still others killed by shrapnel.⁶⁴ Armenians, including women, were tied to horses and dragged through fields until they died. Houses crammed with people were set alight. Kurdish chieftains and Ottoman officers abducted women, raped them, and forced them to convert. Some were serially raped at the church in the nearby village of Galin, then murdered.⁶⁵ Young boys were abducted into Muslim households.⁶⁶ Occasionally, abductors sold the children. For instance, a chief of the Kurdish Rushkotli tribe sold a brother and sister, aged 9 and 11, for 150 piasters.⁶⁷ To avoid discovery, mothers suffocated crying children.⁶⁸ Fearing what would befall them if they were found, some Armenians jumped into a "raging" river and drowned. "The river is said to have been red with blood for three days," a missionary reported.⁶⁹ Several survivors went mad.⁷⁰ Priests were subjected to especially vile treatment. One was reportedly "strung to a beam and cut to pieces." Another was chained by the neck, with two soldiers pulling from opposite sides. In the end, bayonets were placed upright in the ground and the priest was thrown on them. All told, six or seven were murdered.⁷¹

Surviving villagers also told stories about Kurds and soldiers who showed mercy to women and children. But these incidents usually ended with the

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Turks claimed the prisoners died of cholera.⁹⁰ By late 1895 twelve other prisoners, from Talori, had died in Muş, and another was at death's door. British representations only resulted in additional abuse of the prisoners.⁹¹

In the winter of 1895, under pressure by the great powers, the government set up a commission of inquiry to investigate the massacre—or at least pretend to do so. Constantinople also ordered officials in the eastern provinces to restrain soldiers and Kurds: the great powers would be closely monitoring the work of the commission and, in general, goings on in the eastern provinces.⁹² One British report said that initially the government ordered Kurds in the Khowit district to resume anti-Armenian activities but then countermanded the order, enjoining them “to keep the peace till the Commission shall get away.”⁹³

The commission set up shop in Muş.⁹⁴ Attached to it, at the great powers' insistence, were three delegates representing Britain, France, and Russia. They watched the proceedings and reported to their ambassadors. Sometimes the delegates, individually or collectively, pressed the commission to take a certain step or summon a particular witness. But the commission was free to reject such suggestions and often did.⁹⁵

Assisted by local officials, the commission spent the winter and spring of 1895 framing the Armenians for their own slaughter by manipulating evidence, intimidating witnesses, and denying and manipulating testimony. In the estimation of Vice-Consul Hammond Smith Shipley, the British delegate, the commission's efforts were “directed towards showing that the Armenians were in a state of revolt and that they were guilty of atrocious outrages upon the Kurds.” The commission was intent on showing that Armenians “were in every case the aggressors” and that “they were guilty of acts of revolting barbarity.”⁹⁶ On rare occasions the commissioners made a show of seeking out “pro-Armenian” witnesses.⁹⁷ Meanwhile, in a largely successful effort to expunge physical traces of the massacres, soldiers dug the bodies from the trenches at Geligüzan and dispersed them in the snow.⁹⁸ Though one delegate described the “smell” as “overpowering,” the commission found just one skeleton and, otherwise, “fragments of human bones.”⁹⁹

According to Shipley, the delegates were “closely watched” and hampered. They were subjected to “insulting and violent conduct” by police and were forced to contend with “systematic persecution of their servants, guides and

other Christians” who were “brought into any communication with them.” Authorities exercised “administrative pressure on an extensive scale” against “all persons suspected of their capacity or intention of giving damaging evidence.” The British even got hold of a letter from General Rahmi Pasha ordering Hamidiyes in the Malazgirt district to make sure that “no one is to be allowed to visit Moush during the inquiry, for the purpose of laying complaints before the Commission.”¹⁰⁰

In cases where the murder of Armenians was undeniable, the authorities and commissioners tried to exonerate Turkish officials and soldiers and lay blame exclusively on the Kurds.¹⁰¹ One Armenian witness, Hebo of Shenik, claimed he had been “threatened with death by the chief of the Gendarmerie if he accused the regular troops and not the Kurds of massacring the Armenians.” Cooperation, on the other hand, would be lucrative. In exchange for testifying to the revolutionary commitments of those killed, and attributing “the burning of the villages to the Kurds” rather than Turkish regulars, the mutesarraf of Muş and the secretary of the commission promised to rebuild Hebo's house; provide him “five hundred sheep, ten oxen and one thousand piasters”; and restore to him 160 liras taken from his brother Kriko, who was killed in the massacre.¹⁰²

The thirty-nine Kurdish chieftains who petitioned Queen Victoria were wise to this betrayal. They explained in their letter that the Turks had prodded them to attack and plunder and then blamed them for what had happened, even though much if not most of the killing had been carried out by regular soldiers. It was, the chieftains alleged, soldiers and gendarmes who carried out “the massacres, robberies, burning and other disgusting works that have taken place among the Sassoun Mountains . . . and they have laid everything on the Kurds.”¹⁰³

In spite of the cover-up, details of what had happened gradually emerged from the investigations of diplomats and the foreign press.¹⁰⁴ Operating from distant Russian-held Kars, a special correspondent for London's *Daily Telegraph* reported that he “and his assistants” had examined “over 200 persons who saw or took part in the massacre.” Among the interviewees were Turkish noncommissioned officers and “wild Kurds.” The Turkish witnesses, he wrote, “are often drunk, but the Kurds speak the truth soberly and fearlessly.” One Kurd described how “the Turkish soldiers took little children by the feet

and dashed them against stones." The Kurd said he saw soldiers torture an Armenian priest, "squeezing his neck, gouging out his eyes, and tearing off his flesh with pincers." The Kurd added, "We hate that; we only stab, or bayonet, or cut off heads. We dislike needless pain." He also claimed he "saw the soldiers . . . joking around" a pregnant woman and making "bets as to the sex of her child. She was then cut open and the money was paid to the scoundrel who had guessed rightly." The report concluded that "the soldiers delighted in torture. They put some to death with scissors, cutting them and opening veins in the neck. Others were sawed, others had the tongues cut out, eyes gouged out, and several fingers removed before death."¹⁰⁵

The commission's determination was that Sason had been the site of an Armenian rebellion. The Turks' report and the delegates' differed, Shipley said, like "night and day."¹⁰⁶ Graves complained of the commission's bias, its failure to probe the 1893 Kurdish depredations that had led to Armenians' "isolated acts of hostility towards the Kurds and . . . insubordination towards Government officials," which had triggered the "terrible reprisals" of 1894. Graves also decried the lack of Ottoman cooperation, which meant he was unable to assess the precise share of the "regular troops in the massacre."¹⁰⁷ The acting British vice-consul in Diyarbakir, Thomas Boyajian, recognized Kurdish culpability, condemning in particular the "Sheikhs of Zilan and Dudan, Gendjo and Khalil of Sassoun, Eumer the chief of the Bekiran tribe, another chief of the Charabi tribe and the brother of [the Sheikh of Zilan], Molla Djami."¹⁰⁸ And Hallward denounced the Turkish explanations as "an extraordinary tissue of misstatements."¹⁰⁹ Ottoman officials, he said, knew that what had occurred were not "clashes" but massacres by Kurds and Turks. None of the Western diplomats bothered to translate the commission's brief report for their own files.

For their part, the British ruled that there was "reason to believe that the British Government had secretly encouraged the Kurds to pick a quarrel with the Armenians." The Ottoman authorities "were apparently driven by a desire to destroy the independence of the district" or, in an alternative phrasing, to break "the strength of the Sassoun Armenians." Tahsin, the British concluded, also sought to extract money from Armenians and gain personal prestige as the suppressor of a revolt. Although there was no such revolt, he may have really believed that he was suppressing one.¹¹⁰

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Western observers initially hoped that the appointment of the commission might "modify" government and popular attitudes toward the Christian communities but were forced to admit that the opposite had happened. "A more than usually fanatical spirit is manifesting itself not only among the soldiers but among the Kurds and other Moslems," Hallward wrote. Soldiers returning to Van from the massacres apparently told Armenian villagers along the way that "their turn would come next if they remained Christian." These soldiers, Hallward thought, seemed "to regard their proceedings at Sassoun in the light of a religious war." The massacre would prove to be merely an "episode" in "the government's general policy of suppressing the Christian element in Kurdistan."¹¹¹

The survivors were still suffering acutely a year after the massacres. One British diplomat believed that the authorities were continuing their effort "to consummate the ruin of the Christians of Sassoun and Talori" under "the guise of superintending" relief for the survivors, who were still living in abject poverty, without housing, food, or clothes.¹¹² Kurdish nomads had returned to the pasturelands, where they continued "eating up the hay," threatening the harvests, and demanding tribute.¹¹³ A letter from a missionary in Muş described the situation around Talori in 1895:

At the beginning of spring oppression began at the hands of the nomad Kurds and others, and the villagers then decided that it was best to return to their former homes. There are about 860 of these houseless wanderers now living in the woods and mountains, in caves and hollow trees, half naked and some indeed entirely without covering for their nakedness. Bread they have not tasted for months, and curdled milk they only dream of, living, as they do upon grass and the leaves of trees. There are two varieties of grass which are preferred, but these are disappearing. . . . Living on such food, they have become sickly and their skin has turned yellow, their strength is gone, their bodies are swollen and fever is rife among them.

The Kurds would shoot these unfortunates "on sight . . . so . . . they will gradually die out. . . . The authorities do not allow them to wander out and beg."¹¹⁴

Survivors largely fled to unaffected villages or to Muş. But some remained in the Sason area, eventually emerging from forests and caves. And some who hid did not emerge. During a snowstorm in mid-March 1895, a *Daily Telegraph* correspondent in Simal visited a house where two girls, aged six and fourteen, had lived on their own since the massacre. He found them "dead, curled up on a wisp of straw, in a corner of the room, with only a skirt apiece for clothing. They were close together. The room was cold as an ice-cellar, and there were no provisions whatsoever."¹¹⁵

The massacre—and the failure to punish the perpetrators—persuaded Muslims in the eastern provinces that "the Christians have been delivered into their hands to do with as they please." So in spring 1895, local officials allowed themselves to behave in "the most brutal manner, beating and torturing [Christian] men, and shamefully ill-using the women" while quartering gendarmes for free in the villages as they extracted exorbitant taxes.¹¹⁶ In *Kegi kaza*, a sub-district jurisdiction, tax farmers reportedly went "so far as to hang up, head downwards, those who, from poverty, cannot pay what is due."¹¹⁷ The abuses continued through the summer. In villages in the plain around Muş, "men are beaten" by gendarmes, "imprisoned, human excrement rubbed in their faces; women and girls are insulted and dishonoured, dragged naked from their beds at night; children are not spared."¹¹⁸

Little aid reached the survivors, in spite of Western missionaries' and consuls' attempts to provide relief. The authorities, who suspected that British diplomats and American missionaries were working to promote Armenian separatism, severely hampered the aid project. Eventually, in what likely was an effort to reduce contact even further, the Ottomans decided that all relief would be handled by themselves rather than by foreigners.¹¹⁹

The news from Sason reverberated across the empire. Reporting from Van nine months later, the British vice-consul wrote that "matters have been brought to a crisis by the Sassoun massacre" and that, if nothing would be done, "similar scenes will be repeated in this province, and existence rendered impossible to the Christian population."¹²⁰ In the Musa Dağ and Kesab areas, news of the affair gave "great impetus" to recruitment among the Armenian revolutionary movements. "The argument that, unless they armed, their wives and children would be butchered was used with great effect," the local British consul reported, "and men would part with everything they had

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in order to obtain money enough to buy shot-guns and revolvers."¹²¹ It is not clear how widespread was this galvanizing effect.

Following Sason, the great powers did nothing except renew the diplomatic pressure to implement reforms. Constantinople noted that its massacres had come and gone without Western retribution.

Constantinople: The Turning Point

More than a year passed before the destruction of the Armenians resumed. The second wave began in Constantinople, on September 30, 1895, and continued in a series of massacres around the eastern provinces. Events in the capital, filtered through distorted news reports and official propaganda, enraged Muslims in the provinces and led directly to orders commanding the slaughter of tens of thousands of Armenians.

What happened in Constantinople is fairly clear. On September 30, groups of Armenians, at least partly organized by Hunchaks and numbering between 500 and 2,000, assembled at Kumkapı, near the Armenian Patriarchate, and advanced toward the grand vizier's offices to voice their "grievances."¹²² According to Currie, the demonstrators "were armed with pistols and knives of an [*sic*] uniform pattern" implying that organizers had distributed the weapons.¹²³ The demonstrators, described in one report as "mostly young men of the middle class," carried a petition railing against "the present state of affairs in our country." The petition protested "systematic persecution . . . with the one object of causing the Armenians to disappear from their own country," "innumerable political arrests," "barbarous and inhuman tortures," "and the iniquitous exactions of the officials and tax-gatherers." Citing "the massacre in Sassoun," the Armenians demanded reform in the eastern provinces and a curb on Kurdish brigandage.¹²⁴

Currie was not convinced of the group's civil-minded goals. He believed that the Hunchak aim was to provoke "bloodshed," which would induce foreign intervention. Many of the demonstrators apparently "took the Sacrament in the various Armenian churches on the preceding Sunday in order to be prepared for death," he wrote.¹²⁵ The patriarch was also alarmed and tried unsuccessfully to stop the demonstration.

The petition and demonstration plan were submitted to the Sublime Porte two days before the gathering, so no one was caught off guard. But when the

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were murdered in another. Two Armenians were killed near a Protestant school. Seven were killed in Scutari (Üsküdar), on the Asian side of the Bosphorus. Contemporary reports indicate that a total of about eighty Armenians were killed and 800-1,000 imprisoned. According to Terrell, the mobs were largely composed of armed softas and "fanatical Moslem priests."¹³⁶

Some Armenians fought back: in at least one case, they attacked a police post.¹³⁷ Many others preferred to stay away from the melee and took refuge in churches around the city.¹³⁸ A missionary remarked that "women have not been molested in any case, even in cases where the mob broke into and robbed houses." As night turned to day, Terrell found the streets empty apart from patrolling soldiers and "turbaned ulemas."¹³⁹

The authorities appear to have paid the rioters, after the event if not before. A softa who murdered an Armenian told a shopkeeper who witnessed the killing that "he used the money received from the imperial bounty on this occasion to complete his theological library." Rewards could be considerable. A Turkish newspaper, *Sabah*, reported on October 5 that the government had just given the madrassas around Sultan Beyezid Mosque "11 sheep and a sufficient amount of the Imperial bounty."¹⁴⁰ An American missionary reported, "Many persons . . . believe" that "police agents disguised as softas" had carried out the pogrom. If true, this would "imply that the authorities had long before prepared the softa garb for hundreds of police agents knowing that the odium of their deeds would thereby fall upon the softa class."¹⁴¹ But, according to most reports, there were genuine softas among the rioters.

After the two days of unhampered violence, the government, under pressure from the Christian ambassadors, arrested sixty softas and deployed guards around the Armenian quarter.¹⁴² But the tension was only deepening. An October 8 report describes softas patrolling Constantinople's streets "in unusual force."¹⁴³ On the 14th a British businessman reported that a number of Armenians were murdered. Hunchaks were forcing Armenians to keep their shops closed—"to prolong the excitement," according to one report.¹⁴⁴ Terrell believed that the Armenians were acting under "orders" from the "revolutionary leaders, whose vengeance they dread if they disobey," while the Muslims, he wrote, "pretend to see in [store closures] a demonstration to arouse sympathy among Christian nations." But Armenian behavior was probably

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day came, the demonstrators were blocked by police near Sultan Mahmud's tomb and told to disperse. After shots rang out—it is unclear who fired first—the demonstrators ran off with police giving chase. According to informants working for the American minister between fifteen and fifty people were killed, "the Turks suffering as much as the Armenians." The Ottoman minister of police said the Armenians initiated the clash when an Armenian drew a knife on a battalion commander "who tried to parlay with them." The French ambassador reported that the Armenians killed a policeman.¹³⁵

Sparked by the clash, Turks swarmed the downtown streets and attacked Armenian passersby. Many of the assaults were carried out by softas armed with clubs. Policemen either looked on or took part. The "repression was merciless," the French ambassador reported. Westerners witnessed gendarmes holding down and then shooting an Armenian, clubbing to death two others, and bayoneting nine prisoners.¹²⁷ A Turkish *cavass* (ceremonial guard) assigned to the British consulate saw four Armenians "bayoneted in cold blood" in the courtyard of the Ministry of Police.¹²⁸

Muslim clerics played a prominent role in the assaults. French Ambassador Paul Cambon reported that immediately after the clash at the Sublime Porte, "a multitude of mollahs . . . gathered on the Hagia Sophia square to deliberate the attitude to be taken."¹²⁹ At least some of them decided to join in. They went about the streets "arresting people, threatening and mistreating the ones they met."¹³⁰ Ginning up their fellow Muslims, they "paraded through the city" a coffin allegedly containing the body of an Ottoman officer slain by Armenians.¹³¹

The following day several Armenians were killed "with sticks and stones" by "the Turkish rabble."¹³² One missionary reported seeing "a number of softas on the streets who looked very savage and who I observed had revolvers under their long gowns." Missionary employees reported witnessing arrested Armenians beaten to death by mobs of softas and other Turks.¹³³

On the night of October 1, and into the early morning of October 2, isolated and sporadic attacks gave way to a full-scale pogrom. Cambon spoke of "passions . . . unchained."¹³⁴ A number of caravanserai (known in Turkish as *hans* and in Persian as *khans*) inhabited by Armenians were attacked, with police connivance or participation.¹³⁵ In one case, twenty-five Armenian laborers were "butchered" by assailants carrying "sticks and knives." Fifty more

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Trabzon had long been on tenterhooks; events in the capital merely intensified existing resentments. In December 1894 Longworth, the local British consul, warned vali Kadri Bey of the Muslims' "bitter feeling." Though such sentiments were "dormant," Longworth was concerned by talk of a future "massacre . . . of infidels" as Muslims reacted to "wild and loose reports of Armenian atrocities committed on Muslims in the interior."¹⁵⁰

The East Ignites

Immediately following the Constantinople pogrom, orders went out to officials in the eastern provinces to organize anti-Armenian massacres. This, at least, was the view of most leading Western diplomats in Turkey. While unable to obtain copies of these orders, the diplomats were convinced by the "uniform methods and system" employed in each outbreak. Such consistency implied that the violence was "directed by some central authority which had powers to enforce its desires." Terrell wasn't sure whether it was the sultan himself who had given the orders or whether the command came from what he called "the Mohammedan priesthood," but he had no doubt that the call had come from on high.¹⁵¹ Cambon was a rare dissenter, suggesting that there might be a split between the government and the perpetrators. To his mind, the government at least appeared to be trying to stop the killings.¹⁵²

Such confusions are understandable, given how the authorities labored to cover their tracks. Postal and telegraph officials often "lost" telegrams and letters sent by diplomatic agents and missionaries, or else postponed their delivery, the better to muddy the waters of culpability and prevent information from spilling out of affected areas. Henry D. Barnham, a British consul, wrote from Aleppo in November 1895:

The authorities . . . have withheld the delivery of the post from Urfa, Aintab and Marash. Special messengers bearing letters addressed to myself and to the American Vice-Consul have been arrested and imprisoned, and my letters restored to me after so long a delay, and in such a condition . . . [as to] warrant the belief that they had been opened. Friends at the various Missions, apprised of these facts, and unwilling to expose their messengers to ill-treatment, are deterred from

not, or not only, a function of revolutionist pressure. As one observer noted in Pera, they "sought refuge in the churches, owing to Mussulman threats."¹⁴⁹ On October 21, to appease the great powers, the government announced a series of reforms. The Constantinople killings provided the urgency, but the sultan's *irâde* (imperial decree) was in fact a belated response to the Sason massacre and the resulting inquiry. The reforms were hammered out in negotiations between the ambassadors of Britain, France, and Russia and the Sublime Porte and were communicated to the valis of Erzurum, Van, Bitlis, Diyarbekir, Mamuret-ül-Aziz, and Sivas—the six eastern provinces, with large concentrations of Armenians. According to the decree, Christian *muvavins* (aides) would be appointed to assist local governors. Christians would be allowed to join the police and gendarmes, in proportion to the size of their communities. There were also regulations designed to curb Kurdish depredations.¹⁴⁶

But the sultan and his bureaucracy had no intention of implementing the reforms. The previous November, the sultan had made his position crystal clear in a talk with the German ambassador, Prince Hugo von Radolin. Abdülhamid "solemnly swore that under no circumstances would he yield to the unjust Armenian pressure, and that he would rather die than introduce far-reaching reforms in Armenia," Radolin reported to Berlin.¹⁴⁷ Terrell considered the *irâde* largely meaningless: the steps prescribed were not made public, and, in practice, the Ottomans failed "to embrace the radical measures so emphatically demanded by" the great powers. Although the *irâde* "restored confidence" among some of the Armenians and Western diplomats who knew of it, Terrell's "own conviction is that [calm] will be only temporary. Permanent security and order . . . are made impossible by the rancor of race and religious hatred, now more bitter than ever." He particularly blamed the scheming of "Armenian anarchists, who will never rest while certain of the sympathy of the Christian world" and "will continue to foment strife."¹⁴⁸

Whatever the culpability of Armenian revolutionaries, the brunt of the damage would be felt in the provinces, where the independence movement was weakest. In Trabzon, the first provincial massacre site in the wake of the riots, "the excitement of the Turks was . . . greatly increased on hearing of matters in Constantinople." They "seemed to infer that all the Armenians were banded together and in armed rebellion against the government," as one missionary put

writing frequently. Telegrams received by private individuals are valueless, as they are subject to the Censure, and nothing [is] allowed to pass which has not the approval of the Government.¹⁵³

For weeks after the massacres, diplomats in Istanbul were at a loss to understand how the orders had been transmitted to the provinces. One British diplomat initially suggested that the "chief instigators of the massacres" were not the Ottoman rulers but rather "spies of the Palace."¹⁵⁴ In time, however, evidence pointed to the Sublime Porte itself: the orders had reached valis, mutessarrifs, and military and gendarmerie commanders from the highest echelons. One British vice-consul, Charles Hampson, quoted a Muş Muslim notable: "After the disorders in Constantinople, instructions were received from above to massacre and to put the blame on the Armenians, and naturally these instructions were followed." Hampson said he could "vouch for the accuracy of the . . . remarks."¹⁵⁵ He subsequently reported hearing from a "generally . . . trustworthy" Armenian that the sultan had sent a circular telegram "to the authorities of the various districts" stating, "The seven Powers are pressing me to execute their wishes in regard to the Arm. question. Such a course would be most prejudicial to our Empire; &c, sooner than adopt it, Turkey must shed every drop of the blood of her soldiers. Be ready, therefore, &c, on receiving my order, put every Arm. to the sword." Hampson was hesitant to believe that precisely these words had been sent, but he was convinced that "some such order" had been received by the mutessarrif of Muş before the massacres.¹⁵⁶

In late 1896 another British diplomat, Fitzmaurice, offered a watered-down variant of this explanation: in the wake of the events in Constantinople, the Sublime Porte had triggered the massacres by sending "cypher" telegrams to the provinces. "The Porte . . . either willingly or unwillingly misinformed, telegraphed the first garbled accounts" of what had happened. "This, becoming known through the officials to the Mussulman population, tends to poison and excite the minds of the latter against the unsuspecting Christians. . . . The telegraphic circular . . . contributed largely to bring about the massacres. . . . The news . . . led to a distinct ebullition of fanatical feeling among the Moslems of [Urfa] while at Birejik they became fiercely excited against the former converts to Islam."¹⁵⁷

The Massacres of 1894-1896

The exact phrasing of these telegrams is unknown; no copies are accessible in Turkish archives. There is clearer evidence regarding the transmission of massacre orders lower down the chain of command. For example, in May 1896 a British diplomat, Raphael Fontana, sent to his embassy the translated text of two signed statements by Kurdish agas from the Harput and Malatya areas. In the first, six agas swore that one Hadji Khalil Aga of Kizil Ushaghi (Kızıl Uşağı) had led 2,000 Kurds in a raid at Harput kaza on "the command of our Padishah"—a term denoting the sultan. In the second, an aga of the Kızılbaş Kurds from the village of Bekir Uşağı, testified that Herirje Zade Abdüllah Aga, a member of Malatya's administrative council, had "sent us a letter inviting us to attack the Malatia Armenians." The aga and his men refused to participate. Some days after the "disturbances" in the town, Herirje sent another official to the Kızılbaş Kurds to "take back the letter," which was returned.¹⁵⁸

Trabzon (Trebizond)

A multiethnic seaside town inhabited by 20,000 Turks, 15,000 Greeks, and 7,000 Armenians, Trabzon in the mid-1890s was ripe for an explosion.¹⁵⁹ Turks in the area claimed they feared large-scale Armenian violence, though as one missionary put it, "it seems incredible that they could have been sincere in this."¹⁶⁰ "Rumors of massacres at Constantinople tended to aggravate matters," Longworth reported.¹⁶¹ There was considerable homegrown instability, too. On October 2, 1895, Lieutenant General Bahri Pasha, the outgoing vali of Van, was nearly assassinated in Trabzon, on his way to Constantinople. Bahri had been walking with the Trabzon town commandant, Ahmed Hamdi Pasha, when both were lightly wounded by a gunman. The shooter was not caught, but the Turks charged two Armenian "accomplices."¹⁶²

The situation escalated further on the night of October 4, when "large bands of armed Muslims from the neighboring villages," intent on plunder, attacked Christian houses, firing guns and breaking in doors and windows. A rumor then spread that Christians were massacring Turks—or, alternatively, that Armenians had assassinated the vali.¹⁶³ A mob of "at least 3,000" mustered, "with knives, pistols and revolvers," and rushed through the streets. Christians fled to consulates and public buildings. But the vali, Kadri Bey, and some Muslim notables intervened and troops were deployed. They arrested the